# Adventure

*April 15th*

*Published twice a month*

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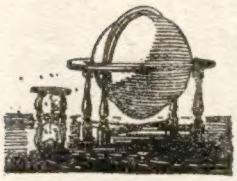

# Adventure

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*Decorations by* ROCKWELL KENT

**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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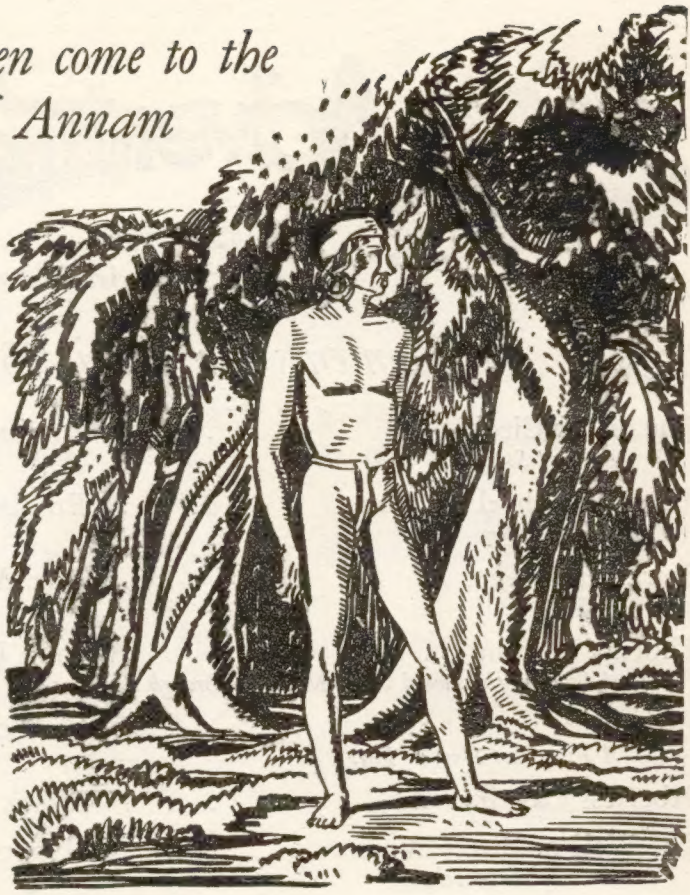
## *Two Frenchmen come to the Land of Annam*



# *The Silver*

A WILD peacock was screaming nightfall in the edge of the jungle along the river. The sound of its sudden voice, like the voice of a human being gone mad with heat and loneliness, made Fridel, slogging along at the head of his column, stand still for a moment in the river ooze to shudder and curse. At his right hand the forest was already black and the blackness rustled with sinister stealthy life. At his left the Song-Bé, the swift brown river, still caught in the net of its rippling surface a last red misty glow. The red glow died. A puff of wind like a fierce sigh heavy with the moist odor of the entangled vines was breathed into his face.

Fridel turned to the sergeant at his shoulder, the only other white man in the little company that trailed him wearily up the river.

"Lost again," he said in disgust.

The sergeant pulled at his black beard and answered with fatherly calm.

"I think not, sir. This guide told me early in the afternoon, you'll remember, that we would have to go faster to hit his village by sunset. It can't be very far but perhaps—"

Fridel interrupted:

"Very well. We'll stop here. Tell them to find a dry corner somewhere and make a fire."

He sat down on a log and dropped his head in his hands. The sergeant shrugged at the notion of finding a dry corner and growled an order to the bearers standing restless under their burdens. The guide, a Moi tribesman whose name was Tu-op, began to protest in his own savage jargon but the sergeant waved for silence. There were low guttural murmurs as the seven bearers rather timidly pushed up a little way into the edge of the brush, to be out of the mud, and unslung the camping gear.

Lieutenant Fridel was more than

By
LYMAN BRYSON

# *Circle*

physically tired. He was suffering the emptiness of an exhausted ambition. When the commandant at Saigon had called him in and told him quite unnecessarily that the French colonial service had no more promising officer and added that he had been chosen after long discussion as the person best fitted to lead the next expedition north into the Moi country, Fridel was inflated with momentary grandeurs. He was so young and so fresh in Indo-China that it never occurred to him that these preliminary remarks were cynical lies. Investigations among the Mois for purposes of scientific and commercial data and incidentally to keep those queer primitives in subjection were difficult, of course. He knew that much. What he did not understand was the calmly concealed expectation of his commandant that he would make a mess of his journey and be sacrificed. He took the pitying glances of his older acquaintances for envy when he told them he was going.

But since he had left Thudaumot, with its half-civilized Mois and the heavy shadow of the white man's domination, several weeks in the bush had worn down his ardors. That night on the Song-Bé river the only reality for poor Fridel was made up of insects and thorns, weariness and heat, and the uneasy sense that the shy savages were laughing at him. He had sent his baggage train of horse carts, his *smala*, around by an easier way. With this fellow who called himself Tu-op, a detachment was pushing across toward the village of Ban Dong.

Fridel held his head in his hands and wished himself out of it—anywhere else in the world.

Meron, the bearded sergeant, who had been going into the Moi country for fifteen years and knew better than any man who had ever commanded him the ways of the upper tribes, bustled cheerfully.

A hundred paces away a solitary figure stood with outstretched arms, and across the murmurings of the bearers the white men heard a low monotonous chanting song. It was Tu-op singing to the night sky.

The young lieutenant rose to his feet, scowled at the indistinct figure of the singing Moi and walked toward him.

"Permit me, *mon lieutenant*," said Meron, gently. "I'll go with you."

Through Meron's quiet interpretation and his own few words of Moi, Fridel demanded of Tu-op why he was making a noise. The old hunter answered him—

"I was praying, white man."

Fridel sneered.

"Praying to what?"

"The sky."

The sergeant put a very respectful touch upon his superior's arm and that was the only reason probably why Fridel did not laugh.

"Why do you sing to the sky, old man?"

"Because through the laziness of the white men who follow me through the forest I am prevented from getting home to my house tonight. I am asking the spirit of my father and my mother to protect my house when I am not there to do it."

Tu-op's wrinkled eyes looked calmly into the face of the officer. The moon shone behind him and as he moved his head there was a glint of metal. A silver ring hung from the pendulous lobe of his left ear almost to his shoulder. It was crude and old and had an irregular grimy surface on which the polished spots shone with a whitish luster.

Fridel's attention was caught at once.

"Very well," he said. "Go on and pray. When we get to your village I'll pay you a piastre for that earring you're wearing."

"Not for sale."

Fridel sneered again.

"Two piastres, then."

But Tu-op, surprizingly, appeared to mean what he said. He could give no reason except that the silver circle in his ear had come from his father and must go to his son.

"It belongs to my son, not to me," he explained.

The Frenchman called him an obstinate imbecile and commanded him to hand over the thing at once or suffer for it. Tu-op dug his bare toes into the river mud and did not answer.

When Fridel drew back his arm the sergeant stepped between them. Fridel shouted, wasting all the wrath of his weariness on this small disappointment.

"I'll punish him! I'll show these —— savages whether they can defy the government—"

"Later," cautioned Meron in his ear. "When he has led us to his village. Not now."

The lieutenant turned away. He sat on his log again and concentrated his bitter thoughts on the little silver circle—worthless but now suddenly become the symbol of his authority.

As he sat there his Annamite cook, one Bep-Toi, came fawning toward him and whispered:

"I heard, O Master. I will get the silver circle for you. Not for two piastres—for nothing!"

But Fridel expected to make the surrender of the earring into the hands of the representative of the government a matter of ceremony and he told Bep-Toi to go back to the cook-fire where he belonged.

They came into Ban Dong early and the old crippled chief in his sedan chair was waiting at the gate of his stockade to greet them. He begged the great warrior and the mighty hunter who came to Ban Dong as ambassador of the French tribes to accept their hospitality, to tell them how they might serve the government, and to complain if any of their people had failed in loyal service.

Fridel had convinced himself that he could not accept a refusal from any Moi. To fail in even the most trivial command would destroy his prestige among them. He was pleased with their reception, he said, but he had a complaint to make against the guide.

Tu-op was standing beside the chief. Fridel pointed at him.

"That man," he said, in French, and Meron translated for him quickly, "has been insolent. I offered him a fair price for the worthless ring in his ear. He refused."

Tu-op stepped forward and faced the Frenchman. The chief began to explain that it was not the custom for Ban Dong men to sell their ancestral earrings, but Fridel clamored violently.

"Very well," said the old chief at last, for he really feared this mysteriously powerful stranger, "Tu-op shall sell his earring."

"It is not mine," said Tu-op with amazing insolence. "And I have not got it." They saw the lobe of his ear was empty.

Defied in the very presence of the visitors the old chief lost for a moment his sense of justice.

"Tu-op is a shame to Ban Dong," he wheezed, rolling his grizzled head and wiping the betel juice from his lips with the back of his hand.

He had forgotten that Tu-op, except for his unfortunate impiety and a certain recklessness about sacred things, was respected for his prowess as a hunter and for his wisdom. He shook a palsied arm at Tu-op.

"He is an enemy of his tribe," he said, in fearful condemnation. "He shall pay a fine of a young buffalo and until the new moon he shall be in disgrace. No man or woman shall go near his house—" The old chief's eyes were staring in a paroxysm of rage that was half fear for himself.

The guilty one, after the first gasp of surprize, was steady and quiet. He turned and walked away toward his house. The people drew back, startled and uneasy at this sudden disaster. One old woman spat a red stream of betel juice after him. Blay, his son, walked away also but none dared include Blay in their gestures of contempt.

The chief, recovering his solemn dignity, went on with his ceremony of welcome. There was a long and heavy feast and Fridel was installed in the house that had been built for him to live in while Ban Dong was his base of exploration.

A sullen embarrassment settled upon the villagers. They seemed unwilling to resume their normal lives with those queer visitors there. The presence of the white men among them with some mysterious purpose, the fear that they might ask for more bearers, or more Ban Dong men to cut paths through the jungle for advance of the baggage train—paths that were quite useless because the jungle reclaimed them afterward in a few weeks—kept the people in restless constraint.

Fridel, however, was not aware of their discomforts. He had too many of his own. Chief among them was the childish notion that he must still pursue a worthless silver earring. It was symbolic of his rights as envoy. He repulsed an offer of help from Bep-Toi, the Annamite, a second time. Only a flicker of his eyes indicated to Bep-Toi that the one who brought the thing by craft or stratagem might not lack reward.

No one supposed the ring was anywhere but hidden safely in Tu-op's hut, now his prison, and Bep-Toi, whose contempt for these savage Mois was as great as only an Annamite's contempt for the jungle people can be, counted on an easy discovery. Bep-Toi saw no reason why his lieutenant should want the thing, but he was a hardy speculator and did not depend only on his skill in boiling rice for his advancement in the world. A number of years' experiment in various kinds of crime had not discouraged him.

IN HIS house at the sunrise end of the village Tu-op kept out of sight. If any of the villagers expected him to give them pleasant signs of his humiliation they were disappointed. Tu-op's woman, who had always been a strange and silent creature among them, went to and fro with her errands after wood and water and smiled calmly when they questioned her. It was freely remarked that any other man less impious than Tu-op would at least have stuck a cock's liver on a

bamboo stick in front of his house, as propitiation to the gods who looked down from the Yumbra mountains on his unjust punishment. Tu-op simply paid his fine of a young buffalo and kept his own counsel—and his silver ring.

He sat one night by his fire chewing his cud of betel. The women were busy in the corner of the smoky room and Blay, grumbling inaudibly to himself, seemed to be planning terrible things for the empire of the French in Indo-China. Suddenly Blay turned toward the door in a swift defensive movement.

"It is only Irap," said Tu-op, stopping him.

The old soothsayer came puffing into the house. His bent old legs had brought him swiftly along the moon shadows and up the notches of Tu-op's ladder, but he breathed hard and his brown face, which was no more than a handful of puckered leather except for the pin-point sparks of his little eyes, was thrust forward eagerly toward the fire.

Irap was accustomed to that house. He was much more than friend. His daughter was wife of Tu-op's son and he was trusted.

"It is a brave thing to defy the order to treat us as unclean," said Blay, respectful and bitter.

"Brave, yes," added Tu-op with a smile, "but for a magician who can make himself invisible to man it is not so hard."

The soothsayer grunted.

"Who could not make himself invisible to a Frenchman?"

"The Frenchmen see only what they bump their noses against," said Blay, "but there is a filthy Annamite cook who travels in the *smala* of these Frenchmen and he is sneaking about this end of the village much of the time. I have seen him and I intend to put a lance through his stomach if I—"

"If you are not restrained by your elder's wisdom," interrupted his father. "You are welcome, Irap, and you know our son well enough to understand his valorous imprudence. Do not be disturbed by him. I have told him many times that no man can understand the ways of these French visitors. We can only be quiet until they go away again."

But old Irap had come to bring news.

"The village is not quiet," he said. "There is great excitement. The Frenchmen have ordered that every man and woman and child—even the children—shall be counted and that the chief shall allow them to write down the number of us in a book and take the book away with them."

Tu-op considered.

"It seems harmless enough."

"But you do not know the magic of these Frenchmen," protested the soothsayer. "There are many things they do not know, naturally, since they live in a strange world off there in the south. But they have magic—" Irap found it difficult to be specific about the black arts of white men.

"No Frenchman will be allowed to number me," said Blay, growling and spitting betel juice at the fire.

"Many men are saying that," said Irap, shivering in spite of the fire and the warm jungle breath that came in through the door.

"Many—if they are really men—can have their will," said Blay.

"Softly, softly, my son."

Blay turned on his father.

"They are two Frenchmen and they have one Annamite with them—a cook. The rest of their *smala* is manned by Rhadé tribesmen. Why should Ban Dong—?"

"Behind these two are many more, my son, and they have guns."

Blay shifted closer to the fire, where he could see better, and felt the edge of his knife with a horny thumb.

There was a stir behind them and one of the women rose. It was Blay's wife, old Irap's daughter. She walked slowly toward the door and stood looking out. Against the moonlight, in spite of their own fire, they could see her slender young figure outlined in silver edges. She stretched her arms over her head and

considered for a moment the swimming depths of the jungle across the river. Then, without looking back, she stooped to the ladder.

For the sake of his dignity her husband did not even look at her, and the two old men turned back to their dismal thoughts.

"There are other men who talk boldly," said Irap, "as does Blay—"

"What thinks the wise old man?" asked Tu-op, meaning the chief.

"He has not spoken," said Irap. "But my own thought is that he is wishing he had not put you in prison in your own house so he could call on you for wise counsel."

"Yah!" answered Tu-op, grinning, "I am a hater of the gods and a fool!"

"Not a fool, my friend," protested Irap. "The Frenchmen stay and stay and no man knows how long they will be allowed to live if they do not go on their journey." He talked on mournfully for a while before he rose on his bent legs and went toward the door. "I will come again when I have news."

His daughter passed him in the doorway, going without a word straight to the corner where she had been before, and was decently not noticed. But Tu-op followed his guest to the little porch above the ladder when Irap slipped away.

"What do you see in the night?" asked Blay at his father's shoulder.

"Nothing," answered Tu-op. What he had seen was a man's form, clothed too amply for that of a Moi villager, stealing off along the edge of the brush toward the house of the invading Frenchman.

Later, when he thought all his family was asleep, Tu-op rose and stirred the fire. For an hour he sat there, thinking. Before he went back to his mat he shifted the silver earring, wrapped in a twist of leaves, to a new hiding place.

FRIDEL and his sergeant slept together in their Moi house. It was too new to have pleased a villager; its split bamboo floors were raw and the familiar griming, polishing touch of human life had not spread over its yellow and green interior. It was good enough for those strangers.

The work of finding out for the benefit of the French Empire in Indo-China just what the Moi villagers did and thought went on slowly through hot, irritating days, but the census had not yet been taken. Meron awoke one morning and sat upon his mat by the door. Fridel was still sound asleep. The sergeant, rubbing his eyes with broad square hands, contemplated Fridel and thought how much he looked like a child. His fresh young face was flushed, his dark hair, curling on his forehead, was matted with perspiration. His mouth under the little black mustache was pouting and soft.

Over Meron's face, under the crinkly bush of his black beard, went a smile of indulgent pity. He buttoned a linen coat over his chest, pulled on his trousers and walked to the door, shoes in hand. He whistled softly to call Bep-Toi and hurry breakfast.

Usually the smell of Bep-Toi's cooking would be drifting through the camp at this hour. This morning there was only the fresh wind coming down the canyon cut by the river through the forest and stirring the leaves of the thatch above his head. He called again. There was no answer and all around him was a strange silence. Meron put on his shoes and slid to the ground.

The ashes of Bep-Toi's cook-fire on the ground at the corner post of the house were cooled from last night's work. The joint of bamboo filled with rice and the four eggs which had been given him at sundown as raw material for this morning's breakfast were still in his basket on the porch. The bearers and drivers of the *smala*, who should have been busy at their own morning rice, were gone. The camp of the *smala*, behind the house and a hundred yards away, was wiped out—men, animals, stores, everything. Alarmed, but quiet, Meron went toward the village.

He expected to see a bustle there of women at the river getting water, of chickens and pigs and dogs and children

running fraternally through the dirt, of grave-faced hunters stretching sleep from their brown limbs on their sunny porches. There was nobody. Ban Dong was absolutely silent although the sun was high above the palms.

He went on slowly among the houses that seemed on their stilts a little decrepit although they had been all occupied the night before. It took human occupation to give their flimsiness the look of permanence. He climbed a ladder or two and looked in. All empty. The chief's house with its stockade was deserted too.

At the sunrise end of the village he saw one gray finger of smoke wavering toward the bright sky where the bronze rigors of daylight were beginning to burn. Toward that house he walked swiftly, hoping to get back with some definite news before Fridel awoke. It was Tu-op's house.

But he did not mount there and ask for news. Under the house he found his missing cook, Bep-Toi, tied up in a rattan rope, chewing mud by the side of a bamboo pole and almost insane with rage.

He cut the Annamite loose without smiling or asking questions. Bep-Toi stretched his cramped legs, cast a look of deadly resentment at the house of Tu-op and limped toward his morning duty. Sergeant Meron saw the quiet old man in the doorway and greeted him.

"*Bay chon?* What's the matter?" asked Tu-op, respectfully.

"The village of Ban Dong has run away, O my friend," said Meron. "Will you tell me why?"

"I am exiled from my people because a Frenchman wanted the *bo hual* from a man's ears more than he wanted justice," answered Tu-op. "How should I know what they do?"

"But my chief and I are without rice or bearers," answered Meron.

"Perhaps if they do not find some other place they like better the men of Ban Dong will return," Tu-op answered solemnly, and turned back into his house.

Meron did not shout or scold at him. He hurried to the new house and found Fridel, tempestuously cross at having to wait for his breakfast, storming at the bruised and crestfallen Bep-Toi.

The sergeant wanted breakfast served before he called his commander's attention to the desertion of the villagers and all the Mois of their *smala*. He intended to wait until good humor followed rice. Bep-Toi's fire was on the jungle side and when the lieutenant came down the ladder things looked as usual in that direction—sunlit thickets in the peace of early morning.

But a long *con-nar*, a Moi arrow, came out of nowhere and interrupted their meal by stabbing into the ground in front of them and quivering there. Fridel leaped to his feet and jerked his pistol from his belt. The silence of the deserted village behind them seemed to have deepened. The wind was dead. The leaves and branches and twisted vines of the forest wall hung slackly, as if waiting in limp apathy for something to happen.

Meron pulled the arrow from the ground, snapped it over his knee and fed the fire with it.

"*Mon lieutenant,*" he said, smiling strangely in his black beard, "I have the honor to report that we are besieged."

AFTER Tu-op had watched the Frenchman and the Annamite cook walk away from his house he entered again. His grave old face was not lightened by the amusing spectacle of Bep Toi's limping anger. He knew perfectly well how Bep Toi's legs were aching because he had twisted the rattans around the cook's muscles with unbenevolent dexterity and he had pushed the moon-faced sneak's nose into the mud under the house with explicit directions as to how he could lie there and rot. But he felt no triumph. Inside his home he had his own heavy problems.

Blay was not there. There were only the three women and one of them, Blay's wife, was weeping convulsively in a corner. Tu-op's own woman and his mother were at the fire, hurrying breakfast rice

with the silent grim speed that denotes something wrong in the household.

Finally his mother, who very often took advantage of her incalculable age and offered unasked opinions, began to grumble. She ignored the weeping of her grandson's wife and defended her grandson.

"Blay was wiser than all the rest of us to run away with the tribe," she said. "This village is accursed by the presence of those two strangers from some barbarous country—no one knows where—these blue-faced men who want to practise magic on us with numbers. We should have gone too. The chief would have forgotten his sentence of imprisonment against you, Tu-op, now that he sees the Frenchmen are our enemies."

Tu-op offered her no explanation of his refusal to flee with the other Ban Dong people. It had all been settled briefly that night while the two Frenchmen slept peacefully. Blay had seen the others getting ready to go, and Tu-op had forbidden the women to follow Blay when he joined the hunters, armed for war.

At the present moment Tu-op was concerned with something else. He ate his morning rice and then beckoned to his daughter-in-law who still sat weeping in the corner. She followed him out of the house while the old woman scolded at them. Tu-op walked among the deserted streets to the only other hut he had a right to enter as his own, the home of Irap the sorcerer. And Irap's daughter followed him up the ladder into this house.

She did not cringe before Tu-op but it was not because he showed any relenting of his sternness.

"Now," he said, "where is the silver earring?"

"I have told you, revered one, that I do not know."

"Shameless! I found you trafficking with that Annamite thief and heard him name a price."

"Yes, revered one. But I have not taken it, nor given it to him. I do not even know where you have hidden it."

Tu-op seemed sad as well as angry.

"Treachery in a man's own house is a great unhappiness," he said. "Why should you give away your own husband's heritage? It was only for him I was keeping it. It was for him that I accepted a disgraceful punishment rather than give in to the whim of this Annamite's insane master—"

The girl sobbed afresh but she looked the old hunter honestly into the eyes.

"I did not take it," she repeated.

"You talked to this thief—shameless as a monkey's mate—while your own father and your own husband and I were before your own fire, worried by the troubles that have come to Ban Dong. You bargained with him."

"Yes, revered one, I do not deny that."

"Ah," said Tu-op, "then how can you deny everything else?"

"Because—you will not believe me, revered one, because this is the sort of enterprise that nobody believes in unless it is successful—but I intended to take his money and then mock him as fool. I intended to give the money to Blay. How could I have delivered up the earring to him when I did not know where it was?"

Tu-op was puzzled. He had come upon the Annamite and his daughter-in-law in the shadows, had heard the shameful proposal of the thief that the woman sell the family property, and had then leaped in and knocked the Annamite flat. But he had failed to find the silver earring either on him or on the woman. He had tied up the Annamite and left him to think over the ways of sin. But the ring was not in its hiding place in the house. It was gone.

He studied the grief-convulsed face of his daughter-in-law.

"Your scheme," he said, "if you ever had any scheme like that, was shameless and wicked. If there are fine and delicate matters to accomplish, such as making a fool of an enemy, let the men of the family take care of it. I will believe your story when the *bo hual* is found again."

"But, revered one!" She held out her hands to him.

"When it is found again," repeated Tu-op, "remember now that we are living in a besieged village with the enemies of our tribe. Keep indoors. Let thy elders do the work outside the house as it is necessary. If the Annamite comes again I shall kill him."

Tu-op searched his house carefully again for the earring. He would not discuss its disappearance with any of his women, nor let them help him hunt. He turned over every small thing, unwrapped a dozen twisted green leaves that lay about in corners, searched the chinks of the bamboo walls and the thatch of the roof. He searched patiently, even a little stupidly perhaps, and he found nothing.

ARROWS came down in a little shower around the breakfast fire of the two French explorers. Meron was not surprized to see how the arrival of positive danger smoothed out the lieutenant's childish irritation; he had expected that. But he had no illusions about what was in store for them. He followed Fridel when the lieutenant got up and walked with dignity into the shelter of the house but he smiled as he listened to his chief's plans for what they should do next.

"It is a bad affair, *mon lieutenant,*" he said. "There is really nothing for us to do next."

"Do you intend to die?" asked Fridel with crisp scorn.

The old sergeant continued to smile.

"It is not my intention, exactly, sir, but it is probably my destiny. I have always expected to end my journey on the point of a Moi arrow."

"There is always an alternative, Meron?"

"Yes, *mon lieutenant.* In this case it is starvation."

"But what about this obstinate old savage who refused me his trinket. He is here with his women, is he not? He certainly does not intend to starve—"

"Nor to help us," Meron added, respectfully interrupting.

"But he will have food and we can get it."

"I will try," said Meron.

The result of his trying was that six minutes later he lay on his face in a Ban Dong lane with an arrow neatly stuck in his side.

He had been allowed to get thirty paces away from the door of the new house. The arrow which dropped him had come like the others out of nowhere. Fridel, who stood in the doorway and cursed, did not see so much as a stir in the jungle wall to shoot at.

At first Fridel thought his sergeant was dead and only that suspicion held him for a moment. Whatever sins of insolence and misunderstanding might be charged against him, Fridel was not a coward. When Meron moved painfully he leaped from the doorway to the ground and ran to help.

The arrows came so fast then that he saw their direction and he emptied his pistol at the brush which seemed to be spitting them out at him. One seared the calf muscle of his leg but did not hold, and he only stumbled. Meron was a heavy man. Fridel got under him with difficulty. His bulk bent the lieutenant's slender back almost double. A double target, they moved slowly toward their refuge.

The shower of arrows stopped. It was as if the Mois, hidden in the green walls all around, were withholding their fire to see this painful effort of the little lieutenant, dragging a limp white sack. They allowed him, ironically perhaps, to get to cover.

Only once while he was being tortured with movement, did Meron speak.

"I believe the arrows are not poisoned, sir," was what he said in a tone he meant to be reassuring.

He fainted when Fridel put him as gently as he could down upon the bamboo floor of the house and opened the camp surgery case. The arrow was only a pointed stick and it came out easily. Fridel examined the end carefully for traces of the sap of the tree called *chahuay.* It seemed clean and innocent but he could not be sure. He washed the

wound in Meron's side and made him comfortable. That was simplified by the sergeant's refusal to admit any pain whatever. Fridel went back to his post at the doorway.

He could not see the one occupied house at the other end of the village where Tu-op and his women waited. Ban Dong, to his eye, was empty of everything but the threat of arrows.

Hours of quivering sunlit monotony went by. Occasionally Fridel would murmur something to himself—an exasperated curse, perhaps. Once he turned and caught the calm eye of his wounded sergeant fixed on him. Meron smiled.

"Bad enough, *mon lieutenant*. But there is still some time left."

"Left for what, Meron?"

"To make our own score."

"Certainly. But where in all their cursed green jungle am I to shoot?"

In answer to this complaint Fridel heard a scratching noise somewhere near the house. Meron heard it too, and murmured a respectful warning. But Fridel was cautious enough. He did not step carelessly out of the door to the head of the ladder where he would have been a magnificent target. He peered around the bamboo door post in both directions and saw nothing.

The scratching persisted. It seemed now to be directly under his feet and he applied an eye to a crack in the bamboo flooring.

"It is I, O master," said a dolorous voice in Annamite. "Here, hidden in this empty box under the house. How can I get into the house before they kill me? What can I do, master—"

"Ah!" said Meron. "The valorous Bep Toi!" He tried to laugh but the attempt ended in a choking cough.

Fridel told his cook to stay where he was and keep quiet.

"But I can not stand this cramping any longer. O master, I die where I am. The flies and the heat—"

"Be still!" commanded Fridel. "After sundown you can come up."

The day went on, its hot silence broken sometimes by a low whining complaint from Bep Toi in his blistering refuge. The Ban Dong people gave no sign of interest in their prisoners except once when Bep Toi tried to ease his ache by lifting himself half out of the box. Then their vigilance was demonstrated in a single arrow that clicked against the bamboo post by Bep Toi's head. He cramped himself again with a moan.

There was a little water in an earthen pot in a corner of the hut. Fridel put a wet cloth on Meron's lips from time to time but took none himself. He was waiting for night.

TU-OP also was guarding a doorway. He was sitting between the posts of his own house, his face toward the jungle where his eye could sometimes catch the signs of a sentry's movement. But he was listening all the time to the chatter of the women behind him. He watched at his door because his mother, openly defiant, had declared her intention of running away if she got a chance and joining the people in the brush.

"Why should I stay here?" she demanded. "If Tu-op wishes to side with the blue-faced strangers—"

"I do not," said Tu-op decisively.

"You stay here when even your own son has gone and you—" The old woman snarled and whined and scolded.

Tu-op did not trouble to answer again. His own wife was docile, as always. His daughter-in-law stirred mournfully under suspicion of treachery.

His wife was trusted to go to the river for water in the later afternoon and they had their evening rice in silence. Afterward he resumed his seat in the doorway.

The moon came up late that night. There was a swift moment of tropic dusk, then an hour of starlit darkness. Under cover of that darkness, when her shameful grief could not be seen, Blay's woman crept to the side of the old man.

"Revered father," she pleaded, "listen to me."

Tu-op did not answer, neither did he command silence.

"If you would let me go now, while it is dark I could find Blay in the brush and perhaps he could tell me something about the silver ring. I would ask him and return before moonrise—"

"And be shot by the Frenchmen," grunted Tu-op.

"Perhaps." She paused to consider that possibility. "But I think they would not see me in this end of the village. It is easy to go from here down that lane to the big palm tree and across—"

"And there you will meet the Annamite, I suppose."

She shook her head sadly.

"No, revered one, I have explained about the Annamite."

Tu-op was looking away from her toward the nearest house. "You are having nothing more to do with him, then?"

"I swear it, by the gods of Yumbra Mountain, father. It was a foolish trick but it was innocent!"

"Ha!" Tu-op snarled. He took her childish wrist and pulled her closer to him. "And while you are explaining," he whispered, "he is waiting for you. Look there!"

A dull blotch of white moved around a corner, barely visible. It was moving toward them in cautious spurts from house to house. Blay's woman leaned against the old man's arm and stared desperately. Together they watched.

"No," she whispered at last. "That is one of the Frenchmen."

Across the last open space, Lieutenant Fridel came in nervous leaps. He stood panting at Tu-op's ladder, his face turned upward, almost within reach of Tu-op's arm.

"*Bay chon?*" asked the old man, with polite interest.

The explorer's knowledge of the Moi tongue was fragmentary and what he had to say was mixed horribly with Annamite terms but the old hunter understood him. When he had finished, keeping his position as a suppliant at the foot of the ladder, Tu-op replied—

"And you ask me to give you food, stranger?"

"My comrade is wounded and they will not let us leave the house by daylight. We will starve unless you help us."

"And if I do help you, you will starve, nevertheless," said Tu-op in a sleepy indifferent voice.

Fridel took hold of the bamboo ladder with both his slender hands and gripped it hard to keep his self-control.

"But my comrade is wounded," he began again, "and we have nothing. Our bearers—"

"Listen, stranger," said Tu-op. "Any wise man could see that if you get food from me they will keep me also under control of their arrows and then we shall all starve. I have rice for three days only in my house. Climb up the ladder."

Fridel hesitated and the old man repeated his invitation more bruskly. The Frenchman came up awkwardly, for shoes are not meant for clinging to notches in a log. The girl had withdrawn into the house and Tu-op made a sign of welcome. When Fridel had seated himself by the door Tu-op looked off toward the east. The moon was just beginning to show its rim, huge and red, in the thin upper fronds of the forest trees.

"There is not a great length of time for us to do all our business," he said.

Fridel looked at him, stupid with anxiety and bewilderment.

"Our business?"

"Yes, we will go back to the beginning. First there was the matter of my prayers."

"I do not understand," said Fridel.

"You interrupted my prayers and spoiled them and the gods of the Yumbra have been angry with me since and have visited misfortunes on my head, inside my house and out of it."

"I am sorry," said Fridel, humbly.

"We share that sorrow together," answered Tu-op grimly. "The next matter is the question of the *bo hual*, the silver earring."

"But I have forgotten that, O mighty hunter. I ask pardon for my insistence—"

"Patience, patience," said Tu-op. "Men are always ready to say they are sorry when they are in danger. Your

sorrow does not return to me my earring. It has been held sacredly in my family since the day of my first grandfather. It was precious because no men but my fathers have ever touched it."

Fridel passed his hand dizzly over his forehead. "But I haven't got it, my friend. I have not seen it since that night."

"Your Annamite cook has prowled like a monkey all around my house. I caught him and gave him an examination, and did not find it on him. But no doubt you and he have an understanding."

The uneasiness of Fridel's conscience made him protest swiftly that he knew nothing whatever of such dishonorable conduct.

"If my Annamite has the thing it shall be returned to you."

"That I know," said Tu-op calmly. "Unless he has hidden it where even he can not find it."

"But we are talking, my friend," broke in Fridel, "and I have had no food since morning and my comrade is suffering horribly of thirst."

"The third matter," Tu-op went on impassively, "is the threat of magic against my people of Ban Dong."

"Who threatens them?"

"You do. Numbers are always magic. Any Moi knows that. You have commanded them—I do not know by what authority. Your chief is your own chief only. Our chief is the infirm but venerable man whom you have driven out of his home. But you have commanded them to stand up in ranks and be numbered—"

The Frenchman laughed hysterically.

"Is that why they have run away?"

"Of course. I might have run too, except that my ring had disappeared, and in truth, I do not mind a little magic sometimes." There was almost a smile on his wrinkled, impudent old face. "I am amused by it. That is why I am feared by my own tribe. They call me Tu-op, the Impious."

Fridel's quick mind was desperately grinding.

"I have heard your business, my venerable father. I have given my pledge of regret for offending you. I promise to restore the ring if I can. More I can not do. As for the numbering—that is only because my people wish to know the greatness of the Moi tribes so they may better live as neighbors to them. Surely it is not for wise men like you and me to see magic in so simple a thing."

For a contemplative space of several minutes Tu-op chewed his betel. The moon struggled up from the twisting hands of the palm branches that held it imprisoned and burned above them. The empty lanes of Ban Dong were streaked with shaking light. The old hunter came to a decision and spat a red stream as punctuation of his thoughts.

He rose and went into the hut, returning with a pot of water, some rice and a handful of eggs. These he put at his feet between himself and Fridel.

"Now," he said, "we will end our talk. First, I will tell you that when you say there is no magic in your scheme of numbering I do not believe you."

Fridel began to protest but Tu-op interrupted him.

"I will speak. It will be better for you to listen until I finish. I do not believe you but I am not afraid of your magic. I am curious to see what you will do. Will you trust me? I will give you rice and water on a condition."

"What is your condition, Tu-op?"

"Tomorrow, at the hour of the sun in the palm trees, you will come out of your house where all the people of Ban Dong watching from the forest can see you."

"And their arrows?"

Tu-op made a sign of impatience.

"Would I ask you to come out only to be shot at?" He took up the little pot of water, ready to give. He splashed a drop of delicious wetness over the edge and made a glistening spot on the bamboo.

"I accept, my friend."

Tu-op put the water in his trembling hands. "Hurry," he said. "There is

still a chance for you to get back to your house and your comrade while shadows are long on the ground."

THE uncomplaining Meron drank deep of the water Fridel brought to him. Even Bep Toi, who had crept out of his hiding place and lay on the floor of the house rubbing his limbs and weeping in self-pity, was given a drink and his share of rice.

"Shall I take the old villain at his word?" Fridel asked his question humbly of the sergeant.

"You promised, you say, *mon lieutenant?*"

"Yes, but—"

"Then there is nothing else to do."

Meron, in the drowsy agony of fever, knew that his irritable young chief was getting the lesson of the jungle—patience and humble willingness to learn. In the long wakefulness of the night, Fridel slept fitfully and Bep Toi curled like a cat, snarling in his nightmares.

Meron stared upward into blackness and wondered about the symptoms of the poison of the *cha-huay* tree. His side was not swelling and the bleeding had stopped, but little tremors of heat and pain ran through his body.

He awoke in a cold sweat and saw that it was daylight. Except for a pervading soreness he felt better. The young lieutenant was standing in the doorway looking out into the open space.

He had put on a white tunic, wrinkled from the sack in which it had been carried in the *smala*, but fresh and ceremonially clean. His casque was jauntily tilted on his smooth black hair. He turned and saw that Meron was awake. A brief smile passed between them.

"Pull me to the door so I can see, sir?" Meron asked. Neither one of them paid attention to the wailings of Bep Toi who was beginning fearfully to comprehend that they were facing a test of some kind.

Meron saw the young lieutenant go with a firm step down the notched bamboo to the ground. As soon as he appeared Tu-op stood out from beside a tree at the edge of their little clearing and waited. Slowly they walked toward a central spot, facing each other. The nearest wall of the jungle gave no sign of life or interest. There was an absolute taut silence all around.

Meron watched the two men standing there in the blazing morning light. When Bep Toi, taken with a panic, stumbled over Meron and scuttled down the ladder wildly the sergeant only cursed him in a whisper and kept his eye on Fridel.

Tu-op halted and raised his right arm high above his head. His face was gravely composed.

"O venerable stranger!" He addressed the young lieutenant in a strident voice which carried up and down the empty street of Ban Dong and into the edge of the forest. "O venerable stranger! I am Tu-op, hunter of the Ban Dong tribe."

Fridel saluted. It seemed the only appropriate acknowledgment.

Tu-op was evidently acting with very definite purpose.

"I am as mighty a hunter as any man in the tribe of Ban Dong. I am not afraid of man or beast. I am not afraid of magic."

Again the Frenchman saluted and answered as well as he could—

"You are brave, O Tu-op." On an inspiration he added, "And all the *pakams* of Ban Dong are brave."

"I am not afraid to be numbered. I am here to be numbered, O stranger from the south. Practise your rites upon me."

Meron, watching from the door of the house, bit his lips and clenched his fists hard at his sides.

Very solemnly Fridel took off his hat and made a deep obeisance. His mind, spurred to its swiftest intuition, grasped the meaning of Tu-op's little farce and he played his part.

A monkey, disturbed by some one moving in the edge of the forest, screamed angrily.

"Hold out your hand, O bravest of *pakams!*"

In Tu-op's outstretched palm he made the sign of the figure 1 with his finger tip.

"I count you, a man of Bang Dong. *Muay*, Number One."

The silence all around seemed to coil and snap.

There was a crash of vines and Blay, the son of Tu-op, tall and fierce, waving his bow in his hand, came running toward them out of the brush. Neither Fridel nor Tu-op moved.

Meron watching from the doorway chuckled then in his beard.

"The old savage game," he thought. "Follow the leader!"

Blay ended with a great leap directly beside his father.

"I am also a brave man of Ban Dong, O stranger," he shouted. "Count me also—*clao bar*. Man Number Two."

Then, of course, little Mungye broke out of the jungle and tried to crowd up and take the next place, and the old chief, wheezing and protesting, was carried forward by his bearers. He called out that no one else should be numbered until he could get there and have his rightful precedence.

The census of Ban Dong was accomplished at once with no interruptions but a fight or two which developed from anxiety not to be left out. From their child-like, swift and simple minds resentment and fear had completely gone.

Hunters and women and children scattered into the village.

Fridel, wiping the sweat from his forehead, was left with man Number One, and Blay, his son. Fridel had observed the Moi gesture of respect and he made it heartily.

"You have been brave and you have saved the life of my comrade and myself," he said. "What was your reason, Tu-op?"

"I wanted to test your magic."

"There are better reasons."

"Yes, white man, there are. One is that my people should not needlessly bring down on themselves the wrath of your people."

"And you ask no reward for this?"

Tu-op's face changed; his smile vanished. His eyes were little points of flame.

"Certainly, I ask a reward."

Fridel made a gesture of agreement.

"What may I give you? I have not the silver ring, my friend—"

"You have an Annamite swine. I ask as my reward that I be permitted freely to kill him for the honor of my house."

Fridel stepped back. But some one laughed. It was Blay and he was in great mirth. He could not control himself to speak, although his father gave him a stern command to explain. In answer he turned toward the house and beckoned over his shoulder for them to follow.

The enterprising Bep Toi was lying, neatly spitted, against a pillar. And on the arrow in his heart, tied with a twist of rattan, Blay showed them the silver earring.

"The thief wanted the *bo hual*," said Blay. "I took it from my father's house for fear the thief would find it. But I gave it to him—see? He was running toward us, begging mercy, ready to desert his master. I gave him the ring."

He put his foot upon the body of the Annamite and pulled out his arrow. The silver circle was ripped from the shaft and inserted in his ear. It glistened dully against the moist bronze of his neck and bare shoulder and he shook his head to make it dance.

Later, when Meron was well again and the *smala* turned back toward Saigon, the Frenchmen parted from Tu-op and Blay in solemn friendship. The suspicions Tu-op had held against the woman of his own house were—as between gentlemen—never mentioned.

At the first night's campfire, Fridel said, modestly enough, to his sergeant—"Well, one knows now what can be done with them."

But Meron corrected him respectfully.

"No, *mon lieutenant*. One never knows what can be done with the Mois. One only knows another thing that can not be tried."

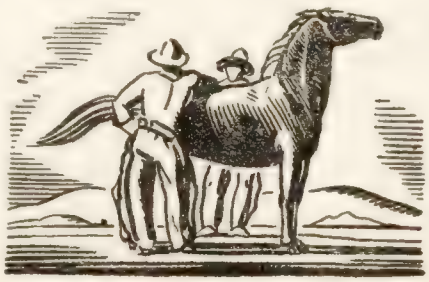
*When an old Border Campaigner moves for peace*

# That Cartwheel Stallion

By EDWIN HUNT HOOVER

"DAD" GALWAY had cast aside less important matters in favor of a romp with his tiny granddaughter. Such diversion acted as a cure-all for whatever ailed him. It made him forget such harassing range problems as the dry tank at Three Trees, the broken gasoline-engine at his Hondo camp and the growing prevalence of loco-weed. It also put a different perspective on the distressing scene that had recently taken place at his own ranch in the sand hills.

"Bop-um!" the tousle-headed tot squealed in delight when Dad, jingling his spurs and clumping his high-heeled boots, essayed a dance—to the tune of a phonograph—the like of which has never been duplicated either on ballroom floor or on professional stage. But it pleased the baby and therefore satisfied Dad.



Dad ceased cavorting and watched for the inevitable sequel to his performance. The infant, on unsteady, plump legs, undertook to imitate her grandsire. The spectacle was one that brought a shout of laughter from the old man.

"That child sure do have the action of a snipe on a sandbar," he exclaimed to the baby's mother, his own golden-haired daughter, who stood by the phonograph.

"Dad!" came the maternal reproof, "you shouldn't make fun of Charline. See! You've hurt her feelings; and I think she does mighty well for a year—considering that she's barely a year old."

Bessie Cramer had been brought up with livestock and had difficulty tempering her speech to the language of motherhood. Almost, she had called her offspring a "yearling"—a fault she reprimanded in the

menfolks, who were gradually breaking themselves of the atrocious habit of calling Charline "li'l heifer" and "filly." Dad, particularly, had been an offender when, in beautiful unconcern he had once—and once only!—declared that the baby looked "slick as a spring calf" in her new pink dress, a gift from Grandpa and Grandma Galway.

Yet he passed up the gorgeous opportunity to call attention to Bessie's near-error of speech, for Charline, with outspread arms, was clinging to his leather-clad knees, looking up at him with beseeching eyes, calling "Bop-um!" plaintively, accenting "bop" which Dad had learned was a sort of imperious command for attention.

He picked up his granddaughter with almost reverent tenderness, and the baby nested gratefully in the cradle formed by Dad's sinewy right arm. Whatever her troubles, Charline found surcease in her grandparent's embrace, observing him with round-eyed adoration. Now she plucked at his long graying mustache experimentally and clung there.

Bessie shut off the phonograph and sat down.

"Dad," she asked, "has there been anything further in the— Have you heard anything more from Mr. Ketcham about the misunderstanding with him?"

"Not from the old man—" Dad folded one of his big hands over the baby's caressingly—"but Lafe was over this mornin' to return my check. He was kind o' snuffy—plum' disagreeable, yuh might say. If I was dealin' with his father, there prob'ly wouldn't be much difficulty, but Lafe, now, he's kind o' bull-headed since he got back from Old Mexico. He'll tone down after a while, maybe," Dad commented tolerantly. "If he don't, I'll have to take it out o' him somehow."

"Dad!" the girl cried, leaning forward. "You're not thinking of—of violence—again?"

"Not if I can help it," her father returned gravely. "But, o' course, a man can't stand it to be accused o' stealin' beef without doin' somethin' about it—an' take personal insult on top o' that—'Specially when—" he smiled—"there's some basis for—"

"But what more can be done?" Bessie implored. "You and Al have both explained that the light was bad when you roped the steer; that you didn't discover it wasn't yours until after it had been taken to your ranch and butchered. You sent your check to Mr. Ketcham to pay for the steer; you notified him before he discovered his loss—"

"That's where I made my mistake," Dad interrupted. "I should 'a' just let it ride an' made it up to Stan Ketcham in some other way—without his knowin'. I feel guilty, too, on account o' bringin' Al into it."

This regret in behalf of Bessie's husband was due to a fear that Cramer, being young, and hot-headed when aroused, might involve himself in a personal feud that would bring dire results. More than anything else, Dad wanted Charline, his only grandchild, to be brought up without the atmosphere of violence and gunplay that had touched Bessie's early childhood and later her womanhood. It had grown to be an obsession so keen that he sought to avoid any possible complications that might grow out of the misbutchered steer episode by going with Al to Stan Ketcham, stating the facts and offering to make good the loss, either by giving an equally fat animal in exchange or by making a money settlement.

There would have been no unpleasant consequences if Lafe Ketcham, lately returned from outlaw-ridden Mexico, had not poisoned his father's mind with insinuations that Galway and his son-in-law were trying to cover up other thefts by making a play at honesty in this one instance. Even so, the elder Ketcham was loath to believe in his neighbors' guilt and wanted to let the matter drop despite his son's insistence. He agreed to accept Dad's check for fifty dollars as complete settlement, and Dad sent it by mail, not wanting to risk a further encounter with Lafe, for he knew that the young man's

mentality was a sad mixture as a result of his sudden change of residence from revolution-torn Old Mexico to law-protected New Mexico. Lafe was eager to believe the worst of anybody and anxious to stir up trouble to appease his craving for action.

There was an interval after sending the check during which Lafe bragged that he had brought "the old cow-thief," meaning Dad, to his knees—silly patter when viewed in the light of Galway's record; four killings in the interests of law and order, and the arrest, single-handed, of "Birdie" Burdette, Texas outlaw and murderer, without a shot being fired.

Dad accomplished this last feat on iron nerve and without even the authority of a deputy's badge, bringing his prisoner from the Colorado border, a distance of more than two hundred miles, horseback, and throwing him into the Hermosa jail before disarming him—so contemptuous was he of the bad man's reputation and lightning draw. Hence, it was hardly to be credited that Lafe Ketcham, with no more background for gunmanship than he had been able to accumulate during two years of filibustering south of the international boundary, would be able to intimidate a veteran of Dad's caliber.

Nevertheless Lafe completed his vainglorious boastfulness by invading Dad's own bailiwick, flaunting the check in his face and tearing it up, stamping on the fragments and proclaiming that the amount ought to be nearer five thousand dollars than fifty. Only the presence of Mrs. Galway, to whom Dad had given his promise that he would never shoot another man under any circumstances unless to protect himself against actual murder, kept the old man from "wingin' the young whippersnapper," as he told his wife when the painful interview finally came to an end.

"You just tell Al—in case he don't come in before I leave—to hold his tongue an' temper," Dad advised. "This 's my affair, my fault. I may have to file libel charges against Lafe in order to make him shut his head.

"Hello, there's Jerrue from Hondo," he said, walking to the kitchen door with the baby in his arms. "Wonder what's on *his* chest. Likely he needs some new part for his engine. Hi!" he greeted the long-limbed, grease-streaked man who was dismounting at the corrals. "What now?"

"Just thought you'd like to know that Hondo is pumpin' water—big!" Jerrue responded with a slight touch of embarrassment.

"What made yuh think I would be here instead o' yonder," Dad gestured in the general direction of his ranch, his eyes twinkling.

"I aimed to send word from here," said Jerrue, taking off his hat at sight of Bessie.

"Yes you did!" Dad retorted sarcastically. "You aimed to play with the baby for an hour, wrap yoreself around a home-cooked meal—"

"Bop-um! Bop-um!" Charline was screaming her delighted recognition of the Hondo engineman, holding out her hands and squirming frantically.

Dad kicked open the screen and went outside.

"Dang my eyes if this li'l flirt ain't about to choose a handsomer man. All right," he chided genially, releasing the toddler to the hard-packed ground. "Desert yore old granddad for a young upstart that ain't hardly got his wisdom teeth—you'll be sorry!"

With never a backward glance, the midget tottered to Jerrue's outstretched arms, and Dad felt that the tableau was worth his privation in giving up the child, for the cowboy-mechanic's face was instantly relieved of the immobile mask that habitually characterized it. His eyes, which Dad considered the most tragic he had ever seen in a human countenance, lighted with joy as he cuddled the youngster, crooning to her in her own language:

"Bop-um! Bop-um! Bop-um!"

The man had never given any account of his past during the two months he had been in Galway's employ, nor had he

been asked for any. He carried his credentials—professing to have, and so proving—an ability to handle livestock and gasoline-engines, rarely leaving his camp at the Hondo well, and then only for short visits to the Cramer house, an hour's ride, where he romped with the baby and, if time permitted, stayed to a meal. Jerrue had not, to Dad's almost positive knowledge, been absent from Hondo a single night, due partly to the necessity for keeping water in the troughs and partly to an apparent lack of desire to go anywhere.

Not once had the man asked for a day off or gone to town. His only recreation was an occasional visit to Cramer's ranch. Two or three times he had made flying trips to Galway's headquarters for instructions in some emergency; but mostly he was entirely capable of handling any situation that arose. Men from the other camps frequently whiled away leisure hours with Jerrue, as Dad learned; found him companionable, an adept at poker and a neat housekeeper. He had a way with horses, too, that gentled saddle stock in miraculously short time.

"Looks like you must 'a' had experience with kids," Dad ventured. "Charline only says 'Bop-um' in that tone o' voice to three of us—her daddy, you an' me."

"Had one of my own." Jerrue looked up over the baby's head with an expression that blended at once the happiness of a cherished memory and the pain of a tragedy. "Fifteen months old when he died. Rattlesnake bite!" he added tersely.

"Wife?" Dad had not intended to ask it, but his sympathetic interest was too strong.

"Suicide! She—" Jerrue's impulse evidently was to say more, but the habit of taciturnity clamped down on him, and Dad, though he knew it was better to get such matters off one's mind, did not insist. He grunted, " 'S tough!" and let it go at that. If the man wanted to elaborate, he would; if not, he wouldn't.

"You better hook up the windmill tomorrow, shut off the engine an' join the rest o' the outfit for the celebration at Hermosa," Dad urged, after a minute in which Charline gurgled her pleasure and kicked her heels over being tossed into the air. "Fourth o' July is a big day in these parts. Bill Purdy, Jack Helinthrope an' 'Fat' Evers are goin' to try their hands at steer-ropin'—maybe they told yuh."

"Yes." Jerrue balanced the baby on the palm of one hand. "I hope Bill wins. He owes me some poker money. Oh, I was just rawhidin'," he apologized. "I don't give a —— whether I ever get it or not—don't need it—but it worries Bill."

"An' then—" Dad recalled further attractions scheduled for the Hermosa rodeo, hoping to draw his taciturn engineman from his shell—"there's goin' to be some sure-enough bronco-ridin'. The committee has combed the hills an' plains for wild broomies. There ought to be quite a scatterment of ambitious cowboys when they try to top 'em off."

"Doesn't interest me very much," Jerrue said regretfully. "Too many horses that would make intelligent saddle mounts are spoiled that way. I don't mind a good running race, but—"

"Listen," Dad warmed to his job, tickled that he had found a response, "there's goin' to be at least one hell-bender of a runnin' race—the mile an' a quarter. Owners from all over have been attracted by the purse. But I'm afraid that a man I can't root for is goin' to cop the grapes—Lafe Ketcham—but that won't spoil the occasion from the spectator's viewpoint. Lafe's groomin' a stallion that he brought out of Old Mexico—one o' the famous Cartwheel brand. Ever see any of 'em work on the track?" he inquired, observing that Jerrue's interest had quickened.

"Yes," said Jerrue quietly. "I've *owned* several in my time. Not so fast on the short sprints, but the breed has endurance. I would—kind of—like to see one in action again."

"Then we'll see yuh in Hermosa tomorrow?" Dad encouraged.

"When do the—festivities start?" The tall cowboy swung Charline to his hip and she rested there, patting his blue-flanneled forearm contentedly.

"Wild-cow milkin' in the forenoon, bulldoggin' an' preliminaries in the bronco-bustin'," said Dad. "Racin' an' such finals as are necessary in the P. M. Better come for the whole show."

"I won't miss the part of the program I want to see," Jerrue assured him. "Well, sister," he addressed the baby. "I reckon I'll turn you over to your granddaddy. I'm driftin' now."

Charline had one reproachful look for her big playmate, then reached out her tiny arms to Dad who accepted her hungrily.

"Say!" the old man reproached Jerrue. "Do yuh always have to be *invited* to stay for a meal? If my nose don't deceive me, Bessie is fryin' chicken, an' she'll be plum' insulted if yuh don't stay."

"Oh, yes!" Bessie's voice, as golden in its tones as was her hair, sounded from the kitchen. "He always has to be invited, but he never fails to accept. Mr. Jerrue, you'll find soap and water in the customary place, and if you'll follow Dad he'll lead you to the food supply. Charline will sit at her usual place and you can feed her."

WHEN Al Cramer reached home that evening, jaded from the day's ride, but with vast enthusiasm for his wife and baby, Bessie delivered Dad's message.

"Dad says you're to hold your tongue and temper—in regard to Lafe Ketcham. Don't let Lafe provoke you into a quarrel," she begged.

"I won't," he promised.

Yet it was beyond reason that Al should accept the insults heaped on him by young Ketcham at the Hermosa carnival next day. Apologists for Ketcham point out that he was drunk, or at least had patronized the local saloons more liberally than a rodeo contestant had any right to do. The fact remains, however, that Lafe reached the fair grounds—on the outskirts of town where a mile of oval race-track circled the fenced inclosure whereon the rougher sports were staged—in a mood that was explosive and exalted.

"The judges had better keep an eye on Al Cramer," he announced in loud tones, riding his thousand-pound bay stud among the contestants who were grouped near the corrals and judges' platform. "He's apt to snare a cow in the milkin' contest an' drag her home, claimin' that she belongs to him!"

This humorous sally brought the blood to Al's cheeks, but no response from his lips. He was busy, at the moment, cinching up his horse and pretended not to hear, though Evers, Helinthrope and Purdy, from Dad Galway's outfit, eyed him inquiringly.

Later, when Al was awarded first prize in the curtain-raiser, having roped, tied and extracted a few gills of milk from a longhorn *bosque* cow in fifty-three seconds, Lafe again raised his voice:

"That's a good rope Cramer's usin'. He stretched it on one o' my steers to give it quality—an' then butchered the steer."

Again Al kept his own counsel—and his promise, which he had renewed on the way to town with Dad.

But during the "spud" race when Ketcham goaded Al's mount in the flank with the sharpened stick used for spearing potatoes, spectators saw Cramer launch himself from his saddle, overbalance Ketcham and crash to earth with his man. By the time Dad Galway arrived on the scene the fighters had been separated, Ketcham with a battered eye and Cramer with blood streaming from his nose.

"We'll settle this later," Lafe snarled, pushing away the restraining hand of his father, who had been one of the first half-dozen spectators to rush into the performers' inclosure and hurl themselves between the belligerents.

"Say when—an' where!" Al spat blood that trickled into his mouth.

"First time we meet—an' have your gun hangin' loose!"

Dad broke through the crowd in time

to hear Al's acceptance of the challenge:

"Be sure I will!"

"Here! Here, now!" Dad faced the combatants anxiously. "You boys don't mean a word you're sayin'—"

"The —— I don't," Lafe rasped.

"No yuh don't!" Sheriff Sam Serviss appeared at Dad's elbow and took charge. "I know all about this business from start to finish. Lafe, you horned in an' made trouble over somethin' that don't concern yuh—"

"I'm managin' my Old Man's affairs," Lafe broke in. "I ain't goin' to see him stole blind—"

"That'll do for you," declared Serviss, his black mustache bristling. "If yuh have any grievance on that score, swear out a complaint. If yuh haven't, keep yuh lip buttoned! Now, I ain't goin' to augur the question, but I'm goin' to settle it right now. Stan Ketcham, I'm appointin' you to ride herd on yore son for the remainder o' the day; an' Buck—" Dad winced at the old nickname which would persist in bobbing up to remind him and his family of the days when "Buck" Galway was synonymous with "the man who killed the Kandango Kid" —"you're appointed guardeen of Al Cramer for the same length o' time. I hold yuh both responsible for the conduct of yore respective charges.

"The rodeo will proceed," he waved his arms in a gesture of finality.

THE remainder of the day was not a happy one for Dad. In the interests of peace he ordered Al to cancel his entry in the steer-roping and felt the force of his son-in-law's resentment when Lafe Ketcham won first money handily. The one bright spot in the afternoon's entertainment for Dad was to see the look of supreme content on the face of Jerrue when Ketcham's big stallion came thundering down the stretch two lengths ahead of the field. The Hondo engineman had wedged his way through the throng shortly after the noon hour and quietly taken his place against a rear wheel of the Galway buckboard, where he amused Charline and chatted with Bessie and Al during intervals between events.

"I do believe," Dad whispered to his wife in the seat beside him, "that a regular course in horse-racin' would make that man over again."

"It certainly does take him out of himself, as you might say." Mrs. Galway nodded her gray head with such vigor that the flowers on her hat seemed almost to snap on their stems.

"I've been thinkin' o' bringin' him to headquarters ranch," Dad resumed. "We can't accommodate him with much horse-racin', but he'll have us to talk to an' maybe he'll feel constrained to unburden his soul. It ain't a good thing for a man to live alone an' eat out his heart with—with memories of the sort he's hinted at."

"Suits me," she approved, glancing over her shoulder. "Any man that can get along with a baby the way he does ought to be reliable."

Dad wanted no more.

"Son," he hailed Jerrue, who responded as soon as he could release Charline to her mother, "Ma an' I have been talkin'. We'd like to have yuh move over to headquarters ranch. Wind's gettin' better right along an' I don't believe yuh'll have to do much more pumpin' at Hondo."

"I appreciate that, Mr. Galway," said Jerrue, fumbling with his hat and looking at the ground," but I'll be leaving you very soon. I'm sorry."

"Want more wages?"

Jerrue laughed.

"I told you only yesterday that I don't need money. I've scarcely spent five dollars since I've been in your employ. No, I—I'm just kind of shiftless, I guess."

"Kind o' sudden—this decision—ain't it?" Dad eyed him keenly.

"I've had it in mind for some time, but the Cramer baby sort of kept me located."

"An' sight o' that Cartwheel stud *dis*located yuh, eh?"

"Something like that," Jerrue agreed with an odd, twisted smile. "Made me restless. You said that Ketcham isn't a friend of yours?"

"Believe I did," Dad minimized the

situation. "He's one o' these highty-tighty persons that are long on lingo an' short on judgment. Why?"

"Oh, I just have a hankering to own that stallion, and a friend of Ketcham's might be able to drive a better bargain than a—stranger. I'll pass it up for the present an' head toward Hondo. I've seen all that interests me here today."

He bowed politely and disappeared in the milling crowd.

"I wonder—" Dad paid cursory attention to the bronco-riding that brought yells of approval from spectators—"if I couldn't make a pass at peace with the Ketchams an' at the same time keep a good hand by buyin' that Cartwheel horse from Lafe. It's worth tryin' anyhow."

Thus it transpired that Dad, after escorting Al, Bessie, Charline and Mrs. Galway to the Hermosa hotel where they planned a change of clothes in anticipation of the dance that evening, went alone to hunt up Lafe Ketcham. He found his man bellied up against the bar in Dan Hickey's saloon, surrounded by admiring satellites who were helping him spend his prize money. A hush fell on the room with Dad's entrance. The elder Ketcham, toying morosely with an empty beer glass at a table in the background, but grimly "riding herd" on his troublesome son, per instructions of Sheriff Serviss, lumbered to his feet.

"Just wanted to congratulate yuh on a prosperous day, Lafe," Dad smiled amiably, hat in hand and swabbing the sweatband. "Thought maybe we might make a trade on that Cartwheel stallion. He kind of catches my eye."

"Five thousand, two hundred an' fifty dollars is the price to *you*," Lafe shot at him.

"I'm afraid we can't come to terms," Dad commented pleasantly. "There seems to be about five thousand dollars between us."

He turned to leave, waving a friendly hand at Ketcham, Senior.

"The five thousand will buy yuh a bill o' sale to the other ninety-nine beeves yuh haven't offered to settle for!" Lafe declared.

"Which other ninety-nine beeves?"

Dad faced around slowly, carefully, continuing to massage the damp hatband. The question was casual, but his old eyes were drilling down the lane that had cleared between himself and Lafe.

"The ones that you an' Cramer st—uh—uh—were figurin' on—in addition to the one yuh sent us a check for."

"That transaction will be with yore pa, Lafe," Dad informed him steadily, "in case I need more fat stock to fill my contracts with buyers. I was merely inquirin' how much yuh wanted for the Cartwheel stud. If two hundred an' fifty is yore price, we can make a deal."

"I don't want to sell," Lafe blustered sullenly.

"In case you change yore mind, let me know."

Dad put on his hat, stuffed the handkerchief in a coat pocket and walked out. He would undoubtedly have returned if he had known that Stan Ketcham collapsed in a dead faint when the tension was broken by the sound of Dad's footstep on the cement sidewalk. Ketcham Senior knew that his son's life had been in desperate jeopardy, knew that the limit of Buck Galway's patience had been reached and that if Lafe's tongue had not weakened on the word "stole," Lafe's rashness would have sped his gun hand—and there would have been a repetition of other scenes wherein men had sought to outdraw the quiet-mannered, self-contained cowman. And Lafe would have had it coming to him!

DAD was in the hotel parlor chatting with friends when the rest of his party descended from the second floor.

"You've been an unconscionable time for a man that was going to buy nothin' more than a new shirt," Mrs. Galway scolded. "And you haven't put it on, either," her eyes rested on the parcel in Dad's hand.

"No, I got to swappin' lies with Clem an' Aaron here," Dad put the blame on

his two middle-aged companions, who grinned indulgently. "They ain't goin' to stay for the *baile* an' I saw this was the only chance I'd have for a visit. Maybe it'd be a good idea for us to pull our freight. We oughtn't to keep Charline up so late. She's tired already."

"Bop-um!" said Charline noncommittally, from her perch on her father's shoulder, rubbing sleepy eyes.

"Bessie an' I are goin' to stay," Al stated with determination. "No Lafe Ketcham or a dozen like him can run me out o' town."

"I heard there was some kind of a mix-up between Lafe an' Al at the carnival grounds this mornin'," Aaron Rocap spoke up.

"Didn't amount to much," Dad sighed, dismissing the subject. "Only I've got to stay in Hermosa as long as Al does—gave Sam Serviss my word. Let's go in to supper."

Although only half in sympathy with his son-in-law's decision to remain in town, Dad wished repeatedly during the course of the evening that he had not been deputized as Al's guard, for there were no less than three occasions while the dance was in progress when, under other circumstances, he would have *urged* Al to take a fall out of Lafe.

"I can't stand it, Dad," Al raged, about ten o'clock. "I've got to trim him —with fists—just fists. Neither of us has a gun on, so there'll be no shootin'."

"Nope," Dad was adamant. "A fist-fight now means a gun-fight later. Besides, I never went sour on a promise yet. Sam Serviss relies on me to keep you under control."

"Old man Ketcham don't seem to have much influence over Lafe," Al pointed out.

"I ain't responsible for either Ketcham," Dad retorted. "Anyhow, Lafe is simply makin' a fool o' himself."

"Then, if I've got to take it—let's go."

"Suits me," Dad agreed. "Ma! Bessie!" He passed the word along the bench where they were sitting at one end of the dance hall. "We're leavin'."

Bessie smiled and took her sleeping child from mother Galway. She had been in no mood for dancing and had been on the floor only twice—for appearance's sake, with Al. She was glad the evening was over.

At the doorway, bidding good night to friends, their ears were assailed by Lafe Ketcham's harsh voice for the last time—

"Feel safer at home, Al?"

Al's face paled but he said nothing.

IT WAS well past midnight and Sheriff Sam Serviss was preparing for bed in his bachelor quarters near the Hermosa jail when there came a knock on the door. Opening it, he was surprized—and gratified—to find Dad Galway.

Dad entered the room and threw himself wearily into a chair, gnawing his grizzled mustache nervously.

"Sam," he said, turning down the wick of the student lamp on the table, "I've been chaperonin' a —— tough layout this night."

He recited the conduct of Lafe Ketcham and Al's forebearance—under duress.

"An' my responsibility was ended, officially, when I saw Al go into his room at the hotel an hour an' a half ago. He wouldn't hear to goin' home tonight for fear Lafe would think he'd run him out o' town; an' he had a silent mad on. I couldn't sleep for thinkin' of what's apt to happen in the mornin'—in case Lafe should stay in Hermosa. Al has stood all the hecklin' he's capable of, an' I don't have the least doubt that he'll be roamin' the streets by sunup, lookin' for Lafe. I think it's likely that Lafe may lay 'em down an' show the white feather before any real damage is done. I forced his hand in Hickey's place, as a sort of appetizer for supper, an' found that his sand is nothin' but mush."

"I heard about it," Serviss said grinning, "from Old Man Ketcham."

"Still, if Lafe happens to have a belligerent hangover, there's no tellin' what might happen, because Al is at the explodin' point," Dad went on. "Now, I ain't scairt for Al. I think he can take

care o' hisself. But I'm thinkin' of his wife—my Bessie—an' her baby. The husband an' father o' that little fam'ly is headin' toward jail, trial an' —— gen'rally, because Stan Ketcham will insist on prosecution, no matter what the circumstances under which his son should be killed. An' the burden of such matters always falls on the shoulders of the women.

"What I want is that you should be on the job at crack o' day an' side Lafe, if he's still in town, till such time as Al leaves Hermosa; but don't warn him away because that'll give him somethin' to brag about—an' it'd humiliate Al."

"I'll do 'er!" the sheriff gripped Dad's hand. "You can rest easy—an' yuh look like yuh needed it."

"That'll take a great weight—"

Presumably the weight was taken off Dad's mind, but he halted in mid-sentence, listening—as did Serviss—to the clatter of running hoofs down the street. There was not time even for speculation before a horse came to a plunging stop in front of the house, and the rider threw himself from the saddle, lurched up the steps and through the open door.

"Stan Ketcham!" Serviss breathed. "What the ——!"

Ketcham, apoplectic and staggering, stared at the sheriff with unseeing eyes.

"Lafe—*dead!* Down by the river! Galway or Cramer murdered him!"

The words came in hoarse, forced jerks, between gasping breaths.

"Tut! Tut!" Serviss took the overwrought man by the shoulders and tried to push him on to a davenport, without success. "Here's Galway, right in this room. He's been plottin' with me to prevent what you say has happened. An' Al Cramer is at the hotel, asleep. If murder has been committed, we'll have to look elsewhere."

Ketcham peered at Dad with bloodshot eyes and, despite his condition, his hand instinctively sought the weapon at his thigh, but dropped away heavily. He offered no resistance when the sheriff, as a matter of precaution, took the gun from him.

"Sit down," Serviss ordered. "Let's hear what happened."

"I—" he remained on his feet, weaving drunkenly—"missed Lafe at the dance. Some one said he's gone out the back way. Didn't find him in Hickey's. Looked around the street. Went to the corral. His horse was gone. Cut sign at the edge o' town. Found fresh tracks of two horses in the sand—throwin' dirt. This side o' the Rio I found Lafe—dead—" his breath was coming more evenly and the purple splotches on his face were disappearing, but his nerves were on the ragged edge of hysteria—"killed so recent that blood had hardly clotted on his head," he shouted.

"Two horses, yuh said? Where was Lafe's—an' what become of the other?" Serviss asked.

"The Cartwheel stud was grazin' in a clump o' cottonwoods; the other's tracks disappeared in the river. I didn't stop to hunt, knowin' that his murderer would circle back to town an' pretend innocence."

"Why do yuh keep sayin' 'murderer?' " The sheriff was irritated. "Hasn't Lafe been invitin' death lately?"

"But he was leavin' town—to get away from trouble!" Ketcham yelled, his dewlap shaking with the intensity of his agitation, "an' he was shot behind the right ear!"

Sam Serviss was stunned.

"S'pose we go over to the hotel an' see what we can learn from Al Cramer, if anythin'," he suggested.

"Yore first duty is to throw Buck Galway in jail," Ketcham stormed. "It's my opinion," he stated boldly, "that he killed Lafe an' came back to establish his alibi!"

"You're unstrung, Stan," Dad sought to mollify the bereaved parent. "Maybe we'd better wait a while till we see how the evidence tallies out. I'll be within call any time Sam wants me. See, I'm takin' off my artillery an' turnin' it over to the sheriff."

"I'll take you along to the hotel," said Serviss. "You'll have easier access to

Al's room an' can bring him out without any disturbance, while I might have some trouble to handle him."

"Come along."

Dad led the way outside. He was confident that they would find Al sound asleep.

The trio ascended the hotel stairway noiselessly, turned to the right in the corridor which was illuminated only by a dismal kerosene lamp. Dad knocked on a door—twice.

"It's Dad," he called softly when Bessie's sleepy voice answered. "Tell Al to step out here, will yuh?"

"Just a minute," came the girl's reply. Then, "Why, he's not here!" She opened the door slightly and Dad felt a great compassion at the stark terror in her eyes. "But I heard him snoring before I went to sleep! Where do you suppose he's gone?"

"That's what I want to know. Go back to bed. I'll find him." Dad assumed—correctly—that Bessie had not seen the two men standing behind him, and wanted to save her as long as possible from the apprehensions their presence would bring. "Or rather, you slip into Ma's room with Charline. Tell her not to worry about me. I'll be back directly."

He held a cautioning finger to his lips and tiptoed to the stairway again, Ketcham and Serviss following. They heard Bessie pattering down the hall to Mrs. Galway's room before they reached the bottom.

"Just slip into the parlor there, Sam—an' Stan; turn off the light," Dad told them. "Wherever Al is, chances are that he'll return shortly. "I'll approach him—alone—when he comes in."

His tone and manner satisfied Ketcham who blew out the table lamp. In a few seconds they were in darkness, waiting.

Al must have been close enough to the hotel to have seen the light extinguished, for he entered the front door before the three men had time to become impatient. He stood there a moment, in the soft glow that was cast from the hall above.

"Al!" Dad ambled forward out of the gloom. "Where yuh been?"

His manner was gentle, almost indulgent.

Cramer's handsome, virile face flushed red.

"I figure that my parole to you ended at midnight; an' when I couldn't sleep, I got up an' went out for a walk."

"With yore six-shooter for ballast?" Dad inquired.

"I didn't know but what I might run into Lafe Ketcham—an' I wanted to be prepared."

"Find him?"

"I was told he'd left town."

"Let's see yore gun."

"Looky here, Dad," Al protested, "your authority over me was for the day—"

Nevertheless, the force of Dad's personality induced him to hand over the weapon voluntarily, butt foremost.

"Trigger restin' on an empty, but the gun don't smell like it's been shot lately," Dad reported, apparently to himself but in reality to Ketcham and Serviss. "Where'd yuh get that mud on yore boots?"

"Over to the corral. Trough was nearly dry an' I turned some water into it. Say! What're you tryin' to get at, anyhow?"

"Didn't saddle up yore horse—to take a li'l pleasure ride or somethin'?" Dad went on inexorably.

"If I did—what of it?"

"Take a jaunt down the river road maybe? Lope your horse a bit to stir up a breeze?" Dad's fine old eyes bored into his son-in-law, demanding honesty.

"I don't know that I've got to answer you!" Al was becoming defiant.

"See anybody on the road?"

"Not a living soul!"

"Lafe was dead when yuh found him?"

"Dad! How did you know?"

"Because," Dad paused, hesitated, meditated, weighed his thoughts with meticulous care before uttering them, "I'd been there a few minutes before!"

Stan Ketcham had been breathing stertorously. Now he burst out into a roar:

"Grab 'im, Sheriff. I told yuh he was fixin' an alibi!"

Cramer, thunderstruck, leaned against an angle of wall and stared, as Ketcham and Serviss emerged from hiding and Dad handed over Al's weapon that had recently been given into his keeping.

"Dad—you didn't!" Al marshaled his reeling senses. "*In the back of the head!*"

"He wouldn't stop, an' I knew he'd get you or me—or one of us would have to kill him sooner or later," Dad averred grimly. "I intended to give myself up in the proper way—if I'd managed to shoot him in a more respectable way. But when things turned out as they did, I was hopeful that, by coverin' my tracks in the river, I could throw the blame on to a 'person or persons unknown' in spite o' suspicion pointin' at you or me. But your saddlin' 'Snorter' an' ridin' him lickety-split down the river road after I'd been so careful to curry off his back sort o' spilled the beans."

A muffled scream drew attention to Ma Galway in the group at the head of the stairs. Bessie was there, and Charline, half-asleep, murmuring "Bop-um" vaguely. The rest of the hotel guests were still at the dance.

"Pa, have you got yourself in trouble?" Ma demanded.

"If I have, it ain't the first time," Dad responded wearily. "All right, Sheriff. Lead on."

THOSE who had seen Dad Galway force Lafe Ketcham to "draw in his horns" in Dan Hickey's saloon were firm in their convictions that he was not the type of man who would deliberately shoot another from behind. Yet, in the face of the veteran's confession, there was nothing else to believe.

Evers, Purdy and Helinthrope, loyal always, visited the jail to offer anything they had or could steal. But Dad insisted that they could do nothing better than "high-tail it" back to their respective camps and see to it that the cattle had water and that the weak stock was fed.

"I wish," he told them, "that one of you would make a pasear to Hondo an' tell Jerrue that I'd appreciate it if he'd delay his departure till I get things kind o' straightened out. Al will stay in town till after the coroner's inquest in the mornin', but, meantime, there's a bunch o' poor cows an' calves that will come in expectin' feed at his place an' mine. Tell him also that I made an effort to buy that Cartwheel stallion for him, but Lafe wasn't disposed to sell. Maybe if he approaches the old man in the right way he'll have better luck."

Throughout the day, Dad received visitors in the sheriff's office, for Serviss, despite Ketcham's bitter remonstrances against the practise, could not accustom himself to the idea that Dad was a prisoner. It was incredible! And Serviss continued to assert that "there is more to be told," though even his fertile imagination could not suggest what manner of evidence could save his old friend from being bound over to the grand jury on a charge of murder.

Hermosa, being the county seat, boasted seven lawyers. One of them, James Helbig, Al Cramer retained to defend his father-in-law. And James nearly felt himself forced to turn down a nice fee, claiming that in all his broad experience—five years!—he had never encountered a client who built up so air-tight a case against himself. He was reconciled, however, by the "mitigating circumstances" that Dad had been bedeviled, accused of cow-stealing and heckled by the deceased until human endurance could stand no more; and he was further appeased when Dad consented to sponsor the "surprize" testimony that the fatal shot had been fired accidentally, in the sense that Dad intended the bullet to sing over the fugitive's head and force him to turn around and "fight like a man."

Dad's story was that, looking into the street door of the dance hall, he had caught Lafe's eye and that Lafe left the

dance hall with a definite look of challenge on his face; that he had followed Lafe to the public corral where Lafe heaped verbal abuse on him and dared him to "shoot it out" beyond the city limits. Lafe designated the meeting place near the ford where the road crosses the Rio Grande and departed first, claiming he was afraid Dad would shoot him en route to the dueling ground. Dad, in turn, rode the ridges to the appointed place for fear that Lafe would "bushwhack" him. His apprehension proved to be well founded when Lafe did fire two shots at him as he approached the ford.

The major portions of this version were borne out by the fact that one "Blackie" Shuman of the Y L outfit had seen Lafe stop stockstill during a two-step, staring with a strange expression at some one in the street doorway of the dance hall; and immediately afterward, Lafe had excused himself from his partner and vanished through the rear exit. Blackie had tried to locate the mysterious person who inspired such emotion in Lafe, but had been unsuccessful. There was the further circumstance that Lafe's pistol, still clutched in his dead hand, had two spent shells.

Rumors that Dad would plead guilty and make no defense, and counter-rumors that he would, rocked the town. The only citizens who were not in the Hermosa morgue when the jury was impaneled were those who could not get in. The hearing was dramatic, if informal, and real tears were shed by spectators when Stan Ketcham told about his frantic search for Lafe, the finding of his body and notifying the sheriff. The quizzing of witnesses proved interesting, especially the testimony of Blackie Shuman; but when Dad took the stand, the audience was keyed up for a sensation—and was disappointed by his cold, matter-of-fact statements.

Dad was in the midst of his recital when a tall cowboy, immaculately shaven and wearing brand-new overalls that bore evidence of a long, hard ride, pushed through the concourse until he was in the sacred circle where jury, lawyers and coroner were seated. His throat was apparently sore, for his neck was swathed in several thicknesses of linen and he had some slight difficulty in articulation at first.

He held up his hand for attention, begged the assembly's pardon and provided the sensation of the day by announcing sternly:

"It will save Mr. Galway from further perjury if he will surrender the witness stand to me. I shot Lafe Ketcham behind the right ear, killed him—and am —— glad of it!"

The stranger made this speech with the air of one who has rehearsed until he is letter-perfect, yet he could not have known that Dad was in the chair until he entered the room.

"Do you realize that what you are saying will be used against you?" Bellamy, the coroner, demanded.

"I do," declared the cowboy.

"You wish to plead guilty to the crime of which Charles Galway is accused?"

"I do."

This second affirmation came with a certain solemnity that reminded spectators of a marriage ceremony.

"Then," said Bellamy, whose leaning toward pomposity was replaced by a bewilderment that shook his customary poise, "Mr. Galway will vacate his chair; and Mr.—Mr.—"

"Jerrue—Harry L. Jerrue," the new defendant prompted.

"—Mr. Jerrue will be sworn."

The day was hot; the room was stifling; but these conditions did not entirely account for Mr. Bellamy's mopping of his perspiring brow. He was undecided as to whether the procedure was regular. In fact, he felt certain that it was not, but he compromised with his conscience by advising Jerrue to "tell it in your own way," and giving Helbig, the defense lawyer, a black look to indicate that the witness would probably do very well without legal prompting. He had a hunch that some entertainment was in prospect.

"I will have to begin several years in the past," Jerrue began with a faint, apologetic smile, "in order to give you a perspective, but I'll make it as brief as possible, for the recital will be infinitely more painful to me than it can possibly be to you.

"I was raised in Mexico and fell heir to my father's ranch, known as the Cartwheel, when he died. I married an American girl whom I'd met while at college in this country. We had a son, born at a time when Mexico was in tumult; but we were extremely happy in spite of frequent bandit raids that cost us heavily in cattle and horses. When our baby was fourteen months old, the Cartwheel was raided by banditti under the leadership of a white man.

"I didn't resist—never did, knowing it was useless—but I was thrown down, bound hand and foot. The reason was presently apparent. While part of the raiders were rounding up the choicest livestock, a crew of four invaded my wife's room and brought her out, screaming and struggling. The baby, in his cradle, was shrieking his terror. I saw those outlaws driving off the choicest of my herds, and the girl I loved—the mother of my baby—across the leader's horse—"

Jerrue's iron composure broke to the extent that he bit his lip until the blood ran. But his eyes were frosty, like brown agates.

"I mention these things in order that you will have the background for what comes later," he went on stoically. "When peons from a neighboring ranch liberated me—my own had been taken away with the raiders—I wrangled a horse, a poor specimen, afoot and went in pursuit of the outlaws. They eluded me for weeks. I'll not go into details because they're not relevant. But it is relevant that I found my wife—she was twenty-two years old—dying on the open prairie where she had been left by her abductor. Broken and brutalized by the white chieftain, she had managed to get some poison and took it. She lived long enough to tell me a tale of horror that makes me almost impervious to pleasure of any kind even now. She—passed out—in my arms."

Again Jerrue was forced to stop. Emotionless as were his phrases, some well of feeling had been tapped that threatened to mist the agate-like eyes. Apparently he saw nothing of upturned faces and wet cheeks among his auditors. He continued in the same throaty tones:

"I returned to my hacienda to find that the Mexican woman to whom I had entrusted the care of my little boy had allowed him to stray—something that would never have happened if his mother had not been taken away—and he was bitten by a rattlesnake. I saw him die, too.

"There was nothing to keep me at home after I buried my son. So I took to the trail again, trying to find the destroyer of my home. It became a mania. Finally I located him, but he was so well guarded I never was able to meet him face to face. I did, however, manage to send him written messages that I think terrorized him. He managed to lose himself from me by changing commands.

"Again I returned to the ranch. It had been preempted—confiscated—in accordance with the Agrarian Laws. The livestock was scattered, lost, stolen. I came across the Border, worked a week or two here and there, half-crazy and unable to stay any place until I got to Mr. Galway's ranch. I wouldn't have remained there, but his granddaughter took a fancy to me and she being nearly of an age with my own child at the time of his death, almost made me human again. I was content.

"Then Mr. Galway interested me in the Fourth of July celebration here by telling me of the Cartwheel stallion that was to run. There are half a hundred such animals scattered over the continent, but I knew the ravisher of my wife, the murderer—more than the rattlesnake—of my son, had been riding a stud from my herd. So I came to town, hoping, but scarcely daring to believe

that Fate, after appointing an instrument to destroy me would direct me to vengeance. But it did!"

Jerrue held himself in the chair by main strength. Those near at hand heard his whitened knuckles crack.

"When I saw Lafe Ketcham on the Cartwheel stallion—I knew! I knew! Lafe Ketcham was El Blanco—the white leader of the Mexican crew—"

This time the interruption of Jerrue's testimony was due to the second collapse within two days of Stan Ketcham—a stroke of apoplexy that resulted fatally within an hour. He was removed by two husky cowboys who staggered under the burden of his weight.

Jerrue sat immobile and had to be prompted by Bellamy into resuming his narrative.

"I made doubly sure, on a pretext of wanting to buy the Cartwheel stallion, that Lafe Ketcham was no friend of Mr. Galway or his family. If he had been, it might have given him the right to live; but he was not.

"That night, chafing at delay, I looked into the dance hall. Ketcham saw me, and if ever stark terror showed in a human face, it did in his. He tried to sneak away, but I rode the ridges—" here Galway snorted his astonishment that Jerrue should have followed the route he claimed—"keeping him in view until he disappeared in the *bosque*. Then I rode down on him, close enough to talk, and told him that I'd give him a chance to fight me, face to face. He was too cowardly. He shot twice at me from cover, then turned tail and ran.

"Do you think, gentlemen," Jerrue addressed the jury stiffly, "that I was going to let the rat escape after what he had done to my little family? I fired—just once—and he fell.

"If my kill had been made from in front, I would have given myself up to the authorities; but I felt that my friends, the Galways and the Cramers, would be ashamed to acknowledge acquaintanceship under the circumstances. But when I heard, early this morning from Helinthrope, who intended to bring me the news yesterday but was delayed by engine trouble at his camp, that Mr. Galway had assumed the odium of my crime, I came."

Jerrue ceased talking, but remained in the chair.

"Have you anything further to say?" Bellamy inquired.

"I don't believe so." Jerrue assumed a conversational tone. Then, "Yes, I have. Not that it makes any difference what the jury does to me—or thinks of me—but in order that my friends may know that I gave my enemy his chance—though he deserved none—let me show you the marks left by Lafe Ketcham's two bullets."

With a couple of deft motions, he uncovered his neck. On one side the skin was ripped off and the flesh furrowed in a deep, angry gash.

Jerrue unbuttoned his shirt and, drawing it aside, showed a perforation in his right shoulder. A mingled shudder and sob went through the room.

Bellamy cleared his throat, but Jerrue had a final statement:

"Obviously Lafe Ketcham must have shot me before I shot him," he remarked casually. "That's all."

"Has counsel on either side anything to say?" the coroner asked.

Defense attorney Helbig rose to his feet. "I move that the jury be instructed to bring a verdict of 'not guilty.' "

District Attorney Wetherell also rose and made a few remarks about the irregularity of proceedings; but the gist of his talk seemed to be favorable to Helbig's idea.

"I feel that the testimony here given is not such as to warrant holding the defendant for the grand jury," Bellamy announced briskly. "Hence it would be a waste of the county's money to bring him to trial, and this jury is so instructed.

"Jurors will retire—"

"What for?" demanded juror Number 5, one Fritz Fritzel, native-born American, who was Hermosa's leading merchant.

"Well, it's customary," declared Bellamy. "Maybe some one will dissent from the verdict."

"We'll find out —— quick," Fritz promised.

There followed the hum of voices in animated discourse. In a moment the merchant made inquiry—

"Had we better find Buck Galway guilty of perjury?"

"I'd forgot about him," Bellamy acknowledged uncomfortably. He knew now, beyond peradventure of doubt, that the proceedings were hopelessly irregular and that Fritz was poking fun at him.

"Have charges of perjury been brought against Mr. Galway?" he asked severely.

"No."

"Well, then, how in —— can you find him guilty? You'll find him not guilty as charged—or—I mean discharged as not guilty."

"We do," Mr. Fritzel affirmed. "And Dr. Craig, Juror Number 2, speaks for the privilege of attending the—uh—Mr. Jerrue's wounds."

Thus stands Hermosa's official record in the matter.

IN THE Cramer room at the hotel, Dad, Al and Jerrue were gathered to escape the mob that sought to question, congratulate and libate them. Jerrue, now "Harry," since his first name had become known, had been to Dr. Craig's for professional services and felt better after surgical dressings and assurance that the Ketcham bullet would do no harm by remaining in his body.

"Dad," Al was saying, "you actually believed that I'd killed Lafe?"

"Cert'nly. Why else would I have assumed the blame?" Dad snorted in much the same manner as he had done at the coroner's inquest.

"Then what did you think of *me*—for not declaring myself?"

"Well," Dad lighted his pipe and puffed contemplatively, "I would 'a' denounced yuh as a cock-eyed liar if yuh'd pled guilty in public an' disgraced my daughter an' grandchild; but I did feel kind o' hurt that yuh didn't say anythin' in private to me. However, I put it down to the fact that there was always some one around who might overhear.

"Harry," he spoke to Jerrue, who was lying full length on one of the beds, quite pale under the tan, "now that things have sort o' gotten straightened out, it looks like yuh'd change yore mind about leavin' us."

"No, thanks," said Jerrue, "I'll be moving along in a day or two."

"Headed somewhere in particular?"

"No."

"Got anythin' special to accomplish?"

"Not a thing. That's just the point. I haven't an earthly interest. I'm not worth my salt."

But Dad had set his heart on "humanizing" Jerrue and was not to be balked easily.

"Wouldn't care to own the Cartwheel stallion? You could prob'ly claim him now an' get him for the askin'."

"I wouldn't lift a finger to get him," Jerrue smiled.

"You've got friends who'd like to have yuh stick around," Dad persisted.

"Maybe I'll come back sometime for a visit."

"We need yuh here."

Dad was not whipped yet.

"Queerly enough, I don't seem to feel any sense of obligation. I ought to be eager to hear you—anybody—say, 'I need you.' But I'm not!"

Jerrue tried to rouse himself, but his lethargy was too heavy.

"How about buildin' up a li'l herd for yoreself at Hondo? I'll stake yuh to a few cows."

Jerrue had obviously been exerting himself to be polite, but he saw that the effort was futile. So he tried to make his would-be benefactor understand:

"Mr. Galway, *nothing* interests me. Friendship, duty, money—even myself—means nothing. That's the terrible part of vengeance. The anticipation of it fills you until there's room for little else; and its accomplishment leaves you empty. I thought that Lafe Ketcham's death at

my hands would give me undiluted pleasure. Instead, it brought hardship to you, my friends; caused the apoplectic stroke that killed an innocent man, Lafe's father, and brought no joy to me. I don't even feel regret—for anything—"

"What you need is to get good an' drunk!" Dad surmised. "You would at least be full o' liquor."

"I've lost my taste for it," Jerrue replied. "Don't even care for tobacco any more."

Dad strode about the room.

"No response to anythin'!"

Then, without excuse or explanation he hurried out of the door. In a moment he was back, packing Charline in the crook of his arm. He put her on the floor.

Ignoring her father, whom she had seen a short time before, the tiny girl's sparkling eyes found Jerrue, recumbent, but facing her, on the bed.

"Bop-um!" she shrieked happily. "Bop-um! Bop-um!"

She staggered across the intervening space with chubby arms waving wildly.

In another second Jerrue was sitting up with Charline's arms around his neck. The brown agate-like eyes seemed to melt at the touch of the soft, baby face against his cheek; and almost instantly tears were frankly coursing down the countenance that had been stoical, calm, stony, with the telling of his brutal, tragic story.

"This," said Dad to Al, "has its advantages even over a cryin' jag for loosenin' a man up."

Whether Jerrue heard is immaterial. He had suddenly found an interest in life —one that he had forgotten temporarily.

"May I change my mind and—stay?"

"You might speak to Charline about it," Dad suggested.

"Sister," Jerrue inquired gravely, "will you let me come over and play with you sometimes?"

"Bop-um!" Charline replied, entranced by the proposal.

# *Sacrament*

## By BILL ADAMS

SHE seemed a royal swan, though queenlier
Than all the royal swans that ever were.
Along each mast and spar, on every sail,
The starshine glimmered. By her forward rail
Her sailors stood. It was the end of day.
They watched the gold moon rise, the fish at play
Beneath her bows, the birds that flew beside.
The ship flashed bright. She curtseyed like a bride.
She was home-bound, and all her men were gay;
Some sang and others talked about their pay.
"I'll dance at Mother Mitchell's." "I will buy
A di'mon' ring for my best gal." "Oh, aye!
I'll buy a fine new suit and stroll ashore—"
"For me, I'll not go sailing any more!"
"Two thousand mile, an' home! I heard the mate."
*Cling—clang—clang—cling—* Her great iron bell struck eight.
"All's well, sir!" cried the sailor on lookout.
"All right," the mate replied. One sailor swung about.
As they walked forward from the poop thereafter,
With all their voices hushed, and hushed their laughter,
An aged white veteran of the days of sailing,
Who'd been harpooner in Nantucket whaling—
The moon half hid behind a hazy mist—

"Mister," the old man said—his words were hissed,
His wrinkled eyes were grim, his shaggy brows astir—
"Best lay your hand upon the main hatch, sir,
Under the mainsail's shadow." He took his way
Beside the mate, where the sail's shadow lay.
The mate laid hand upon the hatch; then turned
Cold with the thought of ships he'd heard of burned.
"Mum's the good word now! See you keep it still!"
"Aye, aye," the old man said, "Mum's the good word. I will."
The mate strode aft and swiftly to the room
Where sat the master, unsuspecting doom.
"Sir, come on deck at once! There's much that's wrong."
He whispered, beckoning. Forward a reckless song
Came in a burst from out the focsle door,
Where twenty sailors gossiped of the shore.

*"Sacrament," copyright, 1927, by Bill Adams*

A gentle breeze the swaying ship caressed;
The yellow moon sailed gleaming toward the west.
Three solemn sailors, shadowing disaster,
They spoke together; mate, and man, and master.
"*Batten her down. She is afire below.*
*Stretch every halyard. She has got to go!*"

The master sat, a hand upon his chin,
With chart and pencil grimly figuring.
"Two thousand miles, and she's a shuddering oven!"
He stared along her decks. "Wake up, old sloven!
Lift up your heels and, for God's sake, come on!"
The clipper seemed to tremble, like a swan.
Bells broke the hours out. The yellow moon climbed higher.
The wavelets chattered round a ship on fire.
"Two thousand miles is all. If we keep wind, she'll fly it.
Don't tell the men, sir. Best to keep it quiet!"

Her pinions tightly stretched, her every wing
Seemed tremulous to hear her sailors sing
And laugh at midnight; hauling tight her braces.
"The Old Man's putting her to her best paces.
Lord, ain't he got a sudden hurry now!
Look at her going; the old dipping scow!"
"My last ship, she was a fine clipper boys."
"The last ship's always best. Oh, stow your noise!"
The jesting sailors, seated on her rails,
Gazed upward at the moonlight on her sails.
They whistled for more wind, sang carefree snatches;
And no man chanced a hand upon her hatches.

When morning broke they went about their toil.
"Look at the wash beside her! Don't it boil?
I bet she logs sixteen. She's a quick ship.
It won't be long till she lies at her slip."
The mate sent them aloft, off the warm planks,
To work upon the masts, or lash new hanks
Where hanks were weak upon the straining staysails. No one stood
Upon her white-scoured decks of fire-warmed wood.
The master asked, "They guess what is the matter?"
"No, sir," the mate replied. "They laugh and chatter
Of port. They're too carefree to guess."

The ship flew on, a bride in a white dress,
Green water round her bubbling into blue,
And jokes upon the lips of all her crew.
"The Old Man's got a girl ashore as waits.
That's why he's putting her to fancy gaits."

Day passed, and eve returned. The stars flamed bright.
"I fear they'll find it out, sir, in the night."

At midnight, when the bell struck, a young man
Cried, "Touch that hatch, boys! See? You can't— You can?
No, you can not. I knew you couldn't. See?
The Old Man knows it and he ain't told we.
The bloody ship's afire. All flame. Below
She's bloody fire an' up aloft she's snow."

Some whistled; others swore. All hands stared aft
To see the master. The white-haired fellow laughed,
"She's been afire a month as like as not.
A big fair wind is all the chance we've got."
They stood about. They clustered in a crowd.
And for a space no sailor spoke aloud.
The master saw them there. "They've guessed what's wrong.
Fetch them all here, sir. Hurry them all along!"

"Men, she's afire below. I see you know it.
There isn't any help. She's got to go it!
What do you say, lads? Do you want to leave?"
A sailor wiped his brow upon his sleeve,
And looked up to him. He looked down to hear
Their answer. It was one high-ringing cheer!
"Leave her, sir? Why?" Came from the sailor's lip.
"We ain't the sort, sir, what would leave a ship
'Acos she's burning. We will stay by you."
"Thank you, my lads! I knew I had a crew.
There is an island one day's sail away.
I will not hold you. You have but to say."
"We've said our say, sir. Where you goes suits we."
He turned aside, lest any man should see
The salt pride in his eyes. A wisp of gray
Floated from off a hatch and blew away.

At midnight the wind fell. Clouds hid the moon.
The ship lay idle— "Wind'll come back soon,"
The chief mate said. "It better had," laughed one,
"For if it don't, by God, we are undone!"

When morning came again smoke drifted white
About the ship and put the gulls to fright.
All day they threw sea water on the decks
And told of ships they'd known, and talked of wrecks.
"The girls ashore are waitin' you an' me.
Wot makes a man go followin' the sea?"
"I promised my best girl a di'mon' ring."
The younger men looked pale. "Come on, now, sing!
Stretch up those sails again," the mate growled slowly.
The ship's cook, an old fanatic, cried, "Holy,
Holy, holy," out of his galley door. "Now, doctor, stow it!
The ship's afire, old son! I'd think that you might know it!"

"Repent ye sinners!" bawled the old sea cook,
"Hell's fires are waiting for ye!" Some one shook
A tarred fist in his face; then banged his door.
"Cut out your whining, you old wheezy boar!"
The chief mate laughed, the deck beneath him sizzling.

When evening came again a rain was drizzling.
The clipper smelt of damp, of steamy heat.
She was so hot they scarce could keep their feet.
The steward said, "The store room's full of smoke.
The lazarette's afire. It's past a joke."
"I ain't a jokin', Stooard," grinned a sailor,
"It stinks like blubber, fryin' on a whaler."

Doolan, the old man, told a tale of whaling,
In days gone by, out of Nantucket sailing.
Their quarters were abandoned; choking white
With fumes to suffocate them in the night.
Anigh the helm their blankets lay outspread
About her poop. Rain dripped from sails o'erhead.
"At sea a man's too cold, or else too hot,"

A sailor called. "That talk don't help a lot!"
Another answered, "How much do you pay
To buy a di'mon' ring? Wot did you say?
A fifty dollar bill? All right. I'll get it.
My gal'll give me beans if I forget it."

They slept, close huddled up. The wind blew cold.
The mate paced up and down. The doomed ship rolled;
Her master in the chart-house. At the wheel
A haggard helmsman watched the mastheads reel.
The lower sails glowed ruddy. The mate said,
While hissing steam-clouds rose and blew ahead,
"If we don't take them sails off, fire'll get 'em,
And they're a lot too high for us to wet 'em.
Haul up the mainsail! Make the foresail fast!"
While shadowy figures climbed each shadowy mast
A voice called loud, "We'll soon see London town!"
The moon was hid. The misty rain came down.
A rope complained; somewhere a tackle creaked.
Along the railings, rat hordes fought and squeaked.
With trembling hands the pallid steward dished
Some fragments, from the smoking storeroom fished,
Upon the chart-room table. "*Clear away the boat!*"
The master cried. Gruff from his bearded throat,
The words came choky. The boat swung free and hung above the water.
"Old Shenandoah—Oh, I love your daughter,"
Sang Chips, the carpenter. "Ah, stow it, Chips!
All women's names is out of place on ships!"

The old Chips laughed. The crew stood round again.
The squalls came harder. It had ceased to rain.
"Hoorah! Hoorah!" They shook away their doubt.
"By God, we'll save her yet!" A wheezy shout
Replied from forward, on the focsle head,
Of, "Holy, holy, holy!" Doolan the whaler said,
"The cook's that mad he'll jump off of her side."
"*The Lord is holy, and the church His bride!*"
Shouted the ship's cook, his long whiskers flowing,
While from the south the hard wind-puffs came blowing.

Her lower canvas furled, her topsails towered above,
She looked a running maid a man might love.
A maid in snowy skirts, she danced erect;
A princess for a royal groom bedecked.
"Come on! Come on! Lift up those heels, old sloven!
Dear God," her master said, "She's like an oven!"

The wind came wilder. Crested billows ran
Swift by the flying ship, the slave of man.
The night grew darker. Round her a dull glow
Made sea crests glisten like war's bloody snow.
Black rollers moaned beside, like beasts in pain;
Like endless bison on an endless plain.
The squalls smote, bellowing. Her skysails ripped.
Chips slapped his thigh and cried, "The old girl's hipped!"
They gathered by her wheel. The helmsman stared
Ahead where flickery fire tongues lapped and glared.
"The moon's blow'd out," said one. Ribbons of sail
Blew from the skysail yards along the gale.
"*The moon's blow'd out, but we don't lack for light!*"

Far forward, the mad sea cook yelled delight.
"Too late! Too late! Ye damned, ye damned! Ye're burning—
Ye're doomed to hell, and there'll be no returning!"
"Fetch that man here," the master said, "He's cracked."
Far up aloft the skysail gear click-clacked
Against the skysail masts. The topsails strained,
And every inch of her hot hull complained.

Dawn came. Her rail was down, deep to the sea;
The smoke drove from her, eddying to lee.
"Men," warned the master, "now our best is done,
We'd better lower the boat. Her chance is gone.
Over a thousand miles to land. Her fate is sealed."
The ship's pig on the forward deck-house squealed.
"Hark at old Paddy, sir. He don't want us to go."
The master smiled. "Now, lads, it's going to blow.
It's not too late to clear the boat away.
It will be soon. We'd better not delay."

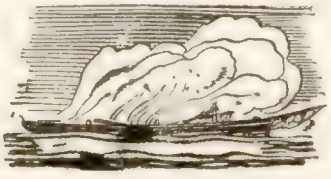
They looked up at her sails, looked to each mast,
Looked to the stormy clouds low-driven past,
Looked to her decks from which gray smoke wreaths came.
Sudden the cook yelled, "Come now—praise His name!"

The sailors swore. The master bit his lip.
"I hate to order them to leave the ship."
He turned, his eyes gone hard, his voice grown stern,
"All hands now, to the boat! The ship must burn."

They left her so. She swung into the breeze,
And lay, with sails aback, on crimsoned seas.
While waves rolled over her the porker squealed,
And squealing rats clung to him as she reeled.
They bit his ears, his back, his twisty tail,
Mingling their fear with his upon the gale.
A young man laughed at porker's dying screech.
The ship's cook rose erect, to try to preach.
The lifeboat tossed. Oil bags were hung about
To keep the roaring sea crests safely out.
"I haven't ate no grub in two whole days,"
A young lad whimpered. "Let us give Him praise!"
The cook bawled, loud upon a sudden lull.
"Sit on his face there! Make him stow that bull!"
They pulled him down. "Come, talk of dandyfunk
Or other tasty dishes. Think if you're drunk
How brave you feel!" The old harpooner's hand

Was on the tiller, steering them for land.
"A thousand mile," he muttered. Turning, Chips
Said, "Doolan, tell us of those whaling ships.
Or some one sing." One of the sailors said, "I left my fiddle
In the ship's galley by the cook's old griddle.
We haven't any music."— "Watch her, Doolan!"
The boat tossed high. The mate called, "Quit your fooling!"

The mate and master with averted faces
Watched the doomed clipper jerking at her braces.
She faded in a mist; then rose again,
Breasting the sea tops, every ratline plain.
The flames leapt from her deck. They licked her rails.
Hot tongues reached hungering for her white sails.
Her crew looked round. Their blazing ship was gone.
The master's face was white. "Her torture's done."



Then the rain ceased, and she came full in view,
A little rift above her showing blue,
A little lilt of sunlight on her mast,
A little kiss for loveliness by-past,
A little memory, to ease her dying,
Of youth and freedom, and the white birds flying
To greet her when she came, light-footed, home,
About her bows a bubbling field of foam.
The cloud rift closed. The rain came back. A blast
Ripped out of her, and overboard each mast.
Waves leaped upon her. Her master turned his head.
All men were silent, honoring the dead.

They made a hundred miles toward their port,
Without a bite of food, with water short.
The sea birds saw them; hovered o'er, then went,
Like washed souls sorry for man's sacrament.
A whale passed by. Old Doolan stiffly rose
On tottering feet to murmur, "There she blows!"
A boy, delirious, in the bottom lay.
"*Wot is the price of di'mon' rings today?*
*I promised my best girl a di'mon' ring.*"
A wan thirst-tortured sailor tried to sing.
Some drank sea water, then sprang overboard
Crazed by the salt. And cook cried, "Praise the Lord!"
The mate and master shook each other's hands.
"Praise be to God! Our good God understands!"
The mad cook shouted. "I 'opes He does," said Chips.
A dying sailor spoke of famous ships,
Naming the *Dreadnaught* and the *Flying Cloud.*
The hours dragged on till none could speak aloud.

When the gale died, when blue broke bright once more,
A steamer found the lifeboat, far from shore.
Save for one man the boat was empty quite.
He'd cast their corpses overboard by night.
His hands upraised, he whispered to them slowly,
And, dying, murmured, "*Holy, holy, holy!*"

# Thord's

## A Story of the Sword

By ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

NOTE—Each story in this series is built around a group of characters, but the real hero—or heroine—is the sword, Gray Maiden, which is traced from its forging through the different hands that wielded it down to modern times. Made for the greatest of the Pharaohs, it saw the rise of Greece and the crowning of Alexander's fortunes; it was witness to the majesty and the decay of Rome; it led the way in the first mad rush of Islam; it knew the birth-pangs of the New World and the last agonies of the Old. There are wide gaps in its history; for generations it was hidden in tomb or burial mound or hung in grim quietude upon the walls of armories. Yet often when men turned to war eager hands reached out for it and swung its shining blade in the van of battle. As some medieval owner scratched in the hard, gray steel:

*Gray Maide men hail Mee*
*Deathe doth Notte fail Mee*

THIS is the story of the coming into Iceland of Elin, the Ireland woman, who was called the Wise; and Aslak Flatnose, the Baresark; and the sword Gray Maiden; and of what happened therefrom.

There was a man named Geir Bjarni's son, who dwelt in the Hornfirth dales and owned farms and had money out all the way east to Berufirth and west to Skeidara Sands and the Side. He was large-bodied and lusty, and men called him "the Wealthy." He took to wife Rannveiga Kolbein's daughter, sister to Aud, who married Herjolt the Hairy, who dwelt at Borgarhaven, close by the Hornfirth dales, and who was the only man in that part of the country who could match Geir's power. They were fast friends.

Rannveiga bore Geir a son, who was named Bjarni. She fell sick of a fever in his sixth winter and died. Aud bore Herjolt several sons and also a girl-child whose name was Astrid. After Astrid was born Herjolt and Geir used to talk over the ale of wedding her in due time to young Bjarni.

"It might be said that she could not do better," Geir would remark, "since all my property will go to Bjarni."

"There will be some few marks in my girl's portion," Herjolt would answer. "But see her out of swaddling-clothes before we set the betrothal feast and handfast on it."

Geir had his household managed by thralls and serving-women after Rannveiga died; the boy, Bjarni, was brought up by such folk, and they found him a handful. He was large like his father, but evil-tempered and spoiled, for none would say him nay, and his eyes were very small and bright and separated only by the jutting beak of his nose. His color was red, and for this reason he was usually called "the Red," until in afterlife he won the name of "the Grasping."

Now, as the Norns spun life's threads, the year following Rannveiga's death the fall gales were unusually severe, and a ship was driven ashore between the skerries on the seaside of Geir's stead by Hornfirth. Men saw the wreck and sent hastily to summon Geir; but when he reached the shore the ship was gone, and of its company but two gained the land, and they unconscious, more drowned than alive, battered by the fierce waves and the

# Wooing Gray Maiden

## Through the Ages

sharp edges of the rocks. One was a man and the other a woman.

Geir bade carry them up to the *skalli*, and when they were laid by the firelight, it was seen that the woman was young and fair, with white skin and hair blue-black like the underside of a crow's wing. Her garments were of rich stuffs, and she wore a gold chain around her neck and on her wrists golden bracelets. The man was a rough-seeming carl, burly, thick-hewed, taller even than Geir; his nose had been broken and was caved into the middle of his face. But what impressed the folk was the splendor of his weapons—a great ax of bluish steel, fastened by a thong to his wrist, and a sword tied into its sheath—and the fact that he wore neither helm nor body-armor, no more than leather breeches and shoon and a jerkin to his back.

"Strange shipmates," quoth Geir. "It is true this fellow may have shocked his mail to lighten him in the water, but I see no rust-stains or buckle-rips on his jerkin, and he has the look of a common carl, while she—"

He looked long at the woman, and wet and bedraggled though she was, her fairness kindled a sparkle in his eye and started a little pulse a-hammering in his temple.

"—she has the appearance of a chief's daughter," he concluded.

Then he ordered a serving-woman to fetch hot broth, and turned his attention again to the man. Curiosity prompted him to untie the sheath-thongs and bare the seafarer's blade; a gasp of admiration escaped his lips as the firelight flickered on the lean gray steel.

"A maal-sword," he muttered. "It is covered with runes!"

Whether it was the heat of the fire or what, the stranger opened his eyes at this instant and, seeing his sword in Geir's hand, snatched it back and scrambled to his feet, glaring savagely about the circle of tenants and thralls. Ax in one hand, sword in the other, he tottered against one of the pillars that upheld the skalli roof.

"Who takes Gray Maiden takes my life," he growled hoarsely. "Back, carls! Or come! I care not, mailed or unmailed, so you give me room for weapon-swinging."

There was a wild scramble to get out of the way. Geir, alone, held his ground.

"A Baresark?" the chief questioned coolly.

"And an outlaw," the stranger boasted.

"You are not an Icelander," said Geir, "and I do not think I have seen you in Norway."

The Baresark laughed shortly.

"I am at Orkneyman. My name is Aslak—'Flatnose' folk call me."

"What errand have you in Iceland?"

"None. I fled after a man-slaying. A Sudreyar ship was sailing and I boarded her. She was Iceland-bound. That is all."

The thrall-woman reentered with two bowls of broth, and Geir took one from her and offered it to Aslak.

"You need not fear us," said the chief. "As for your sword, I admired it. It is a king's weapon."

"It is Aslak's weapon," retorted the Orkneyman. "You did wrong to bare it. There is bad luck for some one when Gray Maiden is sheathed thirsty."

"Gray Maiden you call it?" questioned Geir. And added impatiently, "But drink, carl, drink! Is your belly full that you refuse good broth?"

Aslak accepted the bowl rather suspiciously. Behind Geir the serving-folk were working over the shipwrecked woman, and as the Baresark raised the broth to his lips he regarded their efforts with no less suspicion.

"Gently, there, gently," he admonished.

"What is she to you?" Geir asked quickly.

The Orkneyman scowled.

"You are a great questioner. Well, I will take your questions in order. Yes, my sword is called Gray Maiden—ask me not why; he I had it from called it so, and he said the man who owned it before him gave it the same name. No, my belly is not full—and I am suspicious of all who tamper with my weapons. The wench there? She is nothing to me, but a fair lass."

A low, dazed voice, stammering broken queries, announced her return to consciousness. Geir spun around, peered down at the flower-white face and readdressed himself to Aslak, heedless of the Baresark's insolence:

"But you know who she is? Maid or wife? Free or thrall?"

Aslak shrugged his shoulders.

"Her name is Elin. She came from Ireland with her grandfather—like my case, I think. They were a kingly couple."

"Outlaws!" Geir's voice thickened. "Humph! And orphaned. She must have shelter."

Aslak tossed his empty bowl to one of the thralls.

"Shelter?" he repeated hardily. "Yes, and kindly treatment becoming one freeborn."

"How do we know she is freeborn?" demanded Geir. "You say she is Irish. She may be an escaped thrall."

"Look at her," commanded the Baresark.

She had been propped in a sitting position, and a thrall-woman was feeding her broth from a horn-spoon. Her eyes, gray-blue, fringed by long, black lashes, flitted fearfully from face to face, resting at last with an expression of relief upon Aslak's.

"Where are we?" she asked, stumbling over the unfamiliar Norse speech.

Geir answered for the Orkneyman, naming himself.

"Have you friends in Iceland?" he inquired smoothly.

She shook her head.

"I fled with my grandfather from Dublin in the night. There was a Sudreyar ship, and the Sudreyar men told us that if we journeyed to Norway the heathen would make slaves of us. So we took their advice and sailed on with them for Iceland. Here we thought we should be safe from our foes."

She shuddered, and Geir licked his lips.

"But in Iceland we are what you call heathen, too," he reminded her. "You are an outlander here, without the law. You can not even prove that you are freeborn."

Aslap stooped, and lifted one of Elin's wrists.

"She is a gold-wearer," he pointed out. "Who has seen a thrall—"

"Here I am chief," Geir interrupted, with his first show of authority. "The maid is my prize, cast up on my property. I might enthrall her, but she is fair to look upon and I am a just man. My bower is empty, I am lonely and she has the making of a good housekeeper. Come! What say you, Elin? You can go farther and be granted poorer accommodations."

She stared at him, wide-eyed, and a second shudder wrenched her body.

"Look about you," Geir invited, waving his hand to embrace the contents of the skalli. "Here you shall order all

under me. Where will you find better quarters, more consideration?"

"Nowhere," sneered Aslak. "For you are his, whether you will or no. By the Hammer, a thrall in a golden collar!"

"Is it so?" she appealed direct to Geir.

"It is not," he answered, righteously indignant. "I have said I will take you to wife, although I might enthrall you. Belike, that was what the Sudreyar men intended for you when they reached Iceland."

"What shall I do?" she cried to Aslak.

He fingered the hilt of the sword Gray Maiden and swept the skalli with a speculative eye.

"Do?" he ruminated. "Why, one of two things! Accept his offer or, if you like, come with me. I don't urge you either way, lass. If you stay, you'll lie soft and never hunger. If you come with me—"

"Where would she go?" mocked Geir. "You, a landless man and outlaw, to take a green maid—"

"Oh, I have driven a wolf out of his den before this," Aslak asserted confidently. "But the choice is yours, Elin. I'm not urging you, remember. You'll bed rough with me, and travel far. I'm no handy man with a woman. Please yourself."

Geir frowned at the Baresark.

"You do ill to cross me, carl." he threatened. "The maid is mine."

"As to that, I helped her ashore," returned Aslak. "But for me she would have died in the waves. If she is any one's prize in law, she is mine."

Elin leaped up like a hunted thing, exhaustion forgotten in the desperate issue which fronted her.

"Is it my fate to belong to a man who is strange to me?" she cried wildly. "Let me go, both of you, and I will work the nails off my fingers for whoever will give me a roof and bread."

"Ah, but you are a fair woman!" objected Aslak. "Your kind don't work in still-rooms and brew-vats and dairies."

"All women marry strange men," said Geir. "My first wife scarcely knew me when her father brought me to her on the cross-bench at the betrothal feast."

"There is much to be said in that direction," Aslak agreed largely. "And a woman must always be tagged to a man."

She cast her eyes from one to the other of them. Geir kept his eyes glued on her face, but the Orkneyman followed her brooding gaze as it studied, first Geir, then himself. And when finally she glanced sidewise at the high-seat and the cross-bench, beyond the long range of fires, he tossed his ax on his shoulder.

"Skoal to you, Elin," he exclaimed. "If you haven't chosen right for yourself, you have for me." He tapped his sword-hilt. "This maid keeps me busy. A second might cause disorders in the household. One man, one wife—a good rule."

Her eyes met his frankly, with a look of mingled shame and defiance.

"I am house-bred," she confessed. "If I must yield me to a man—"

She lifted her arms in a gesture of resignation and turned to Geir.

"I cry your kindness, Geir Bjarni's son," she said proudly. "In Ireland I was a princess."

Geir caught her hands with a fine, rough courtesy.

"Here you shall be my wife," he answered. "Ho, thralls, conduct your mistress to the bower."

And, expansive in victory, he hailed Aslak, who was striding toward the men's door:

"Stop a few days, Baresark. There will be betrothal ale to drink."

"Not for me," replied Aslak. "I suspect no good would come of keeping our two maids under the same roof—more especially, as they belong to different men. And mine spits angrily when she thinks a rude hand caressed her. If your's, now—"

He walked out, chuckling, into the twilight. As he stood by the porch, considering which way he should go, a small boy rushed up to him.

"Ho, carl," screamed the child. "What is this the thralls tell me—that my father has brought in a new wife?"

Aslak scrutinized the red, foxy face and little eyes with amused interest.

"If your father is Geir—"

"Who else, stupid?" the boy thrust in arrogantly.

"Ah, youngling, what good manners you have! Well, as I was about to say, if your father is Geir he has brought in a new—wife, did you say? Well, perhaps! Who can read the future? Not I!"

The boy bellowed aloud.

"An ill deed, an ill deed! The house runs well enough. And this woman, they say, will raise up a pack of brats to annoy me. Loki's curse on my father! But I'll hold them down. And if *she* seeks to hinder me—"

His lips contorted in an evil grin, and he skipped up the porch into the skalli.

"Ah, Gray Maiden," Aslak murmured to himself, "perhaps I was overloyal to you. In most soft beds there is a husk."

He squared his shoulders, surveying the dim outline of far-off *jokulls*, a white tracery of snow across the serrated ridge peaks.

"A hard land! Now to see what can be made out of it. Quarrels a-plenty, that I see, already! But what else? Ah, yes, what else?"

## II

THE Sea Woman, Geir's folk called Elin, but soon they spoke of her as "the Wise." She was beloved by all the household, except the boy Bjarni, and Geir himself she could twine around the shank of her spindle. There was none like her in those parts for gentleness or courtesy or wisdom. Be it housework or husbandry or needlecraft or nursing the sick, she had a deft hand and an agile wit. Simples and herbs she knew like an old wife. Also, much of tasty cooking.

But her wisdom shone brightest in unraveling the tangled threads of life. No man or woman asked her advice in vain, and it was commonly said that Geir owed considerable profit to her counsels.

It was she who withheld him from joining Herjolf in an East venture the summer of the Great Harvest; and Herjolf, who was prejudiced against her because of young Bjarni's hatred—and for another reason, which shall be told—hated her as bitterly as Bjarni thereafter, for there was so much food and livestock in Iceland the next winter that the oversea traders could sell only lumber and weapons, and to make a bad matter worse, the fall gales took heavy toll of shipping.

It irked Herjolf that while he suffered loss Geir had only profit to count. He said she was a witch and practised sorcery; but in Geir's presence he was careful to guard his tongue. Geir would suffer no harm to be spoken of her; the Wealthy held a tight rein on Bjarni, too, and restrained his son's malice in the *skalli*, with the consequence that Bjarni rode frequently to Herjof's stead to unburden his woes, and in the course of years became as intimate a friend of the Hairy as ever Geir had been.

So if Elin entered Geir's bower reluctantly, she was not slow in growing reconciled to her lot. He was a good husband to her, as she was a good wife to him. And when a son was born to her in the fall after their mating there was no shadow of a barrier between the two. This boy was named Thord, and he was of his mother's breed. He had her blue-gray, steady eyes and white coloring, with very black hair; and, likewise he had her sweetness of temper. The stead folk loved him, and it was often remarked how different he was from his half-brother, who was sour, close-fisted and overbearing.

Meanwhile, at Borgarhaven, Astrid bloomed to girlhood. She was a golden maid, her eyes a violet-blue, handsome in feature and her yellow locks so long that folk jested of them, saying it was easily to be credited that Herjolf the Hairy was her father. She was not more than a year or so older than Thord, so it came about that they frequently played together. Bjarni would eye them angrily when they did, and come and stand over them.

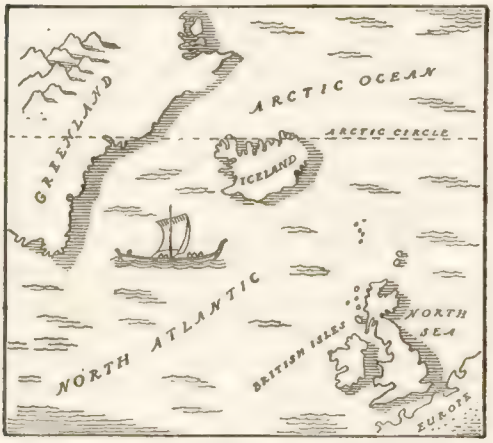
"Take heed, baseborn!" he would growl at his brother. "She is intended for me."

"I shall wed where I choose," Astrid would answer, with a toss of her head. And Thord would say in a cool, off-hand fashion—

"He who wants must take."

Bjarni itched to knife him, but once, when Thord was eight, Bjarni had beaten him insensible, and for that Geir had all but slain his elder son.

"If brothers fight, *skallis* burn," rasped Geir. "Moreover, an honorable youth does not assail children. Another time, carl, I will hew your head off, instead of skinning you with a whip."




Thus twelve years passed. Red Bjarni was a stalwart youth, of his father's height. Thord was well grown, but it was apparent now that he would never equal his brother in stature. Yet he was a lad of high spirit, lithe and limber-muscled and quick-witted, as became his mother's son. Elin found much joy in him. Her life was easy and happy. Secure in Geir's love and the loyalty of her serving-folk, and possessing the friendship of her neighbors, she cared little for the cold welcome she received when she accompanied Geir on his visits to Borgarhaven, where Aud was as hostile to her as Herjolf.

Of Bjarni she took more account, always counseling Thord that he should not needlessly offend his brother, but she reckoned it useless to borrow trouble for a danger unavoidable, and looked to time either to heal the breach or provide a settlement of her stepson's animosity. Truth to tell, wise as she was, Elin could not comprehend the measure of Bjarni's hatred.

If she had ever regretted her choice—if choice it was—between Geir and Aslak, that regret was years since buried. The Orkneyman had journeyed west. They heard of him at intervals, usually in connection with fighting or brawling, once as having made the Greenland voyage. He was retained by several chiefs who had feuds against them for the sake of his weapon skill, and he became famous in the Rangriver Vales and the West Firths country for his deeds as a double-handed slayer. For he fought as no man ever had been known to fight, with ax in one hand and sword in the other. Few cared to encounter him after his reputation was established.

All the more so, when he was outlawed for hewing down Kol Mord's son of Grimsness in a dispute over wages due him. The sentence was that he must pass three years overseas, and he took ship with Oddi the Stout, a Sogn man out of Norway, in the White River late in the summer. And so fared eastward, and was no more seen for the period of his outlawry.

## III

GEIR was riding home from the Berufirth dales where he had been collecting rents, when one of his tenants hailed him as he was crossing Stafafell.

"Ho, Geir," bawled the tenant. "Aslak the Baresark has stolen my calf."

"Your wits have left you, carl," returned Geir. "Aslak is in Norway—"

"No, no, he landed a week past. He was outlawed for a slaying in the Bay. And he says he will live always an outlaw, now, seeing that he has had sentence passed on him in three."

"Peace, peace," ordered Geir reining in. "You seem to know something, after all. But are you certain it was Aslak stole your calf?"

"Certain?" quoth the tenant indignantly. "Did I not see him cut its throat with that maal-sword of his? And carry it off under my eyes? He has just gone off toward Vatna Jokull. You could catch him if you rode fast."

"I will," said Geir, and urged his horse forward along the track.

On the edge of the fell, where it dipped up to the foothills of the *jokull*, he sighted the figure of a man covering the ground with great leaps and bounds, and slung over the runner's shoulder was what looked like a dead calf. Geir shouted several times, and galloped faster, so that presently the runner heard him, looked back, dropped the carcass on the grass and brandished ax and sword in defiance.

"That is Aslak," Geir told himself.

And Aslak it was, wilder and more ragged than when he was washed ashore from the Sudreyar ship, but still clutching the ax of blue steel and the sword Gray Maiden.

"Well met, Geir," he said, a twinkle in his eye. "I hear you made a good match of it. But you ride in haste. Don't let me interrupt you."

"It is I who must interrupt you," Geir replied testily. "Why did you not introduce yourself at my stead if you were hungry? Elin would have fed you for old times' sake. There was no need for you to steal from yon poor carl."

Aslak leaned on his ax and considered this point.

"Ah, but I have no fond memories of your *skalli*," he answered. "And for the calf, why, I asked the fellow civilly for a bite and a sup, and he asked the weight of my silver. I told him I had none, and he bade me apply to you for charity. So I killed his calf. If he had spoken me fair I would have killed yours rather than his. When I must rob, I prefer to rob the wealthy."

"Is that what you have returned to Iceland for?" demanded Geir, flushing.

"More or less," admitted the Orkneyman. "I am tired of being outlawed. It will be easier to live always outside the law. Then I shall at least know where I am."

"Thieves' talk," fumed Geir. "If that is your intention, take yourself elsewhere. You will receive scant mercy here."

"It may be, it may be," owned Aslak, "but I shall try this country, at any rate. The flocks look fat and the folk are prosperous."

Geir frowned.

"No outlaw can bandy words with me. Hand up that calf and be off or I will—"

He flashed his sword, but Aslak laughed good-temperedly.

"Accept a fool's advice, Geir, and be off yourself. This sword of mine is proof against all other steel. Also, I have no wish to slay you, if Elin—"

But Geir rode at him without giving him a chance to finish, and the Baresark dodged away, wielding his weapons skilfully, so as to frighten the horse.

"Stand your ground," shouted Geir. "Do you fear me?"

"Who shall say?" returned Aslak. "This is a deal of trouble over a calf."

At this Geir lost his temper completely and drove his horse full-tilt at the Orkneyman. Aslak tried to dodge again, saw that he could not and struck a lightning blow with Gray Maiden at the horse's crupper.

"Let the nag pay the debt," he cried.

The keen edge bit deep, and the horse pitched forward so suddenly that Geir was thrown headlong from the saddle. He fell some distance away in a huddle of limbs, and Aslak looked grave.

"This is in nowise as I intended," murmured the Orkneyman.

He sheathed Gray Maiden and laid his ax beside the calf, then went and knelt by Geir. The Wealthy's head—helmless for a peaceful journey—had crashed against a boulder; it was smashed to a red pulp. Aslak tapped his sword-hilt regretfully.

"Ah, Gray Maiden, Gray Maiden, did I not say twelve years gone that it was bad luck for some one to sheath you thirsty? You have a long memory, lass. Too long!"

He stood up and reflected aloud:

"Trouble must flow from this deed, I think. But it can not be said that Aslak

slays secretly. No, no! All shall be properly accounted for." He cast a regretful eye upon the calf. "Well, well, there should be more cattle where you came from."

He slung Geir's body over his shoulder, making as little difficulty of the man's weight as he had of the calf's, picked up his ax and strode back along the track.

LATER in the day a frightened farmer entered the yard at Geir's stead, leading a nervous pony, to the back of which was strapped a stiffening corpse.

"Aslak did it," he babbled to the outpouring of tenants, serving-folk and thralls. "Aslak the Baresark. He stole calf from Kettle Freedman's son—over there by Black Water—and Kettle met Geir—and Geir rode after Aslak—and Aslak would not give up the calf. So they fought. He says—Aslak says—that he tried to kill Geir's horse, so as to spare him; but then the horse fell and Geir was hurled against a rock. There is not a brain in his head!"

"It looks like an ax-wound to me," howled a man.

"Yes, yes, an ax," echoed the crowd.

Elin appeared on the skalli porch.

"An ax?" she exclaimed. "Who is hurt? What—"

The ranks split in front of her, and she saw the poor shell of Geir, distorted across the skittish pony's back.

"Mary aid me!" she sighed. "I thought life was over-fair. But carry him in, carls, carry him into his hall. His hall! What will his property serve him, now, who died in heathen wrath?"

## IV

THE corners of the skalli were in darkness. Overhead the shadows pranced and swayed among the roof-beams in response to the leaping flames of the hearth-fires. The ropes that bound down the roof creaked and groaned as the east wind howled under the gables and pushed and clawed at the building. Elin clutched Thord tighter to her and stared across the dais-table at the lowering faces of her enemies.

"But I—" confused, she made as if to brush a veil from before her eyes—"I was his wife. Thord was his son."

Young Bjarni's fox-eyes glittered wickedly.

"His wife! You witch, you tricked yourself into my father's graces, but he never wived you. His bond-woman, yes, that you were—and the brat beside you baseborn."

"The truth," confirmed Herjolf. "There was no thought of marriage. By Rann, who washed you hither, where is your settlement? Who handfasted your betrothal?"

Aud, sitting between the two, laughed venomously.

"Well said, husband! The creature thinks only to purloin our nephew's heritage for her baseborn son."

Now Elin drew herself up, seething with bitter anger; but the boy Thord spoke for her, his voice uncanny in its even coldness.

"All this is thievery you three do," he charged. "And so shall it be termed in Iceland, for it is well known how you have hated my mother and me."

Bjarni clutched at his sword and started to rise, but Aud held him back.

"No, no," she said. "Let them not tempt you to do that which they wish. Slay one or both, and you risk outlawry. Send them out to starve, and who can question your right? For where shall they find folk to bear witness for them—or funds to sue at the Allthing?"

"I'll not rest easy while that bower-rat lives," snarled Bjarni. "Here is as good a chance as any to make an end of him."

Elin's heart near stopped beating. She marked the look of calculation in Herjolf's eye, the wavering in Aud's expression. But Thord glared fearlessly at all three.

"A coward's threat," he exclaimed scornfully. "Give me sword or ax and I'll fight you, here on the skalli floor. What? Shall I call the house-folk to hear me?"

He raised his voice, and Herjolf made up his mind, reaching over Aud's shoulders to clamp a hand upon Bjarni's sword-arm.

"He is a fool who overreaches his advantage," growled the Hairy One. "We need no witnesses tonight. And your aunt gives good advice. They have no case. They must take what we give them, and if that is life alone, how can they complain? Do not all men know Geir came to his death by the stroke of Aslak's ax? And is it not common gossip that Aslak and Elin were washed ashore together from the same ship?"

Aud tittered shrilly.

"Past doubt, husband, past doubt! She concerted with the Baresark. He was to slay Geir, she would smooth matters for him, and then they would set up housekeeping together in a nest Geir had feathered for them. It is likely they planned next to slay Bjarni, and so assure themselves of all Geir's property."

"Then who shall say we have not the right to slay them?" protested Bjarni.

"Ah, some folk are prejudiced," answered Herjolf.

"She has a way with her, this gray-eyed cat," said Aud. "Is she not a Christian—a witch?"

"Suppose she puts a spell upon us?" suggested Bjarni.

Herjolf glanced uneasily at her white face, proudly contemptuous.

"That is an idea worth debating," he admitted. "I suspect she has spelled us before this, and she must have woven a strong spell over Geir to hold him so long in thrall."

Elin broke her silence.

"Yes," she cried, "I will cast a spell upon you, knaves. And my spell is this: Little good shall you have of that which you steal. All that you set your hands to shall go wrong. The folk shall turn from you, and your names will be a mockery on every tongue. Bjarni, there, shall come to a sorry death. Yes, and I give him a new name. From now on he shall be called the Grasping. And you, Herjolf, shall be no longer called the Hairy, but the False. And Aud shall be called the Treacherous. You—"

"Stop her, stop her," clamored Aud, clasping hands upon her ears.

Herjolf winced. Bjarni started to draw his sword again.

"I'll hew off her head," he mumbled. "Thor knows what curse she may yet devise!"

Thord seized a stool from the floor and would have gone in front of his mother, but she put him away and lifted the gold chain which hung around her neck. From the chain depended a tiny cross, with strange, mystic characters graven on it, and this she held on a level with her enemies' eyes.

"By the power of this I stay you," she commanded sternly. "Bide, Bjarni! Touch not your sword, lest your hand wither at the wrist. Herjolf, Aud, over all of you falls my spell. There is death for you if—"

"Oh, touch her not," moaned Aud.

"Let be, Bjarni, let be," babbled Herjolf. "It is ill threatening steel to a witch."

Bjarni's fingers unloosed his sword-hilt, and he wiped a clammy dew of sweat from his forehead. Aud tremblingly signed the Hammer in front of them.

"Go, witch," she quavered. "You may not harm us."

"A horse to Odin," muttered Herjolf. "I vow a horse! No skinny beast, but a plump stallion."

Thord laughed aloud.

"Cowards, the three of you!" he derided them. "Come, Mother, let us go."

"And take nothing with you," shrilled Aud. "Witch or no, there is law in the land, and you may not rob us."

"Not a kirtle," echoed Bjarni. "Not so much as a knife from the weapon-chests."

"No, no, go in peace," stammered Herjolf. "Be content with your lives. If we ever spoke of this night's work—"

"Who would believe you?" demanded Elin. "But I am an outlander and a lone woman, and Thord is but a lad. You are rich and powerful. Well you

know none in the district will venture your wrath to aid me in a suit at law. But I am content. There is a Power above yours, and to that Power I yield my case. Come, Thord!"

"Do we take nothing, then, Mother?" he asked. "Hark to the wind. There is a storm. At least, a cloak to shield you from the wet!"

"A cloak from this house would chill me," she answered curtly. "I will not be beholden to heathen enemies who cheat and steal."

She turned away and, released from the grip of her slate-blue eyes, Bjarni screamed after her:

" 'Tis you are heathen, sea-witch! Look to it, when I am unbound of your spell."

But Elin ignored him. Holding firmly to Thord's arm, she walked down the skalli and out by the Men's Door into the driving scud of the rain. Thord shivered as the wind smote them on the porch-step.

"Where do we go, Mother?" he murmured. "It will be cold tonight."

She hesitated, pondering.

"There is a shepherd's hut vacant over toward Stafafell," she decided. "That will serve for the night. Afterward, He who watches all will be our guide."

## V

THERE was much talk all through the South Country of Bjarni's treatment of Elin and Thord.

"Wedded or unwedded, she was a faithful wife to Geir," said the women.

"Settlement or no settlement, Geir had great profit out of her counsel," said the men.

It was generally believed that Aslak had slain Geir intentionally, but all laughed at the story Bjarni and Herjolf put about that Aslak and Elin had concerted it between them. Yet no one was willing to risk the enmity of the two richest men in the Hornfirth dales by coming out openly and sponsoring Elin's cause. The South Country folk helped her privately, and gave her enemies the names she had spelled them with; but that was as far as any would go. And, indeed, Elin asked no man's help. With the gold links of her chain and her bracelets, she purchased Rolf's Farm, a tiny patch of ground and a poor hut of lava rocks and ship-timbers, and stocked it with a few swine and sheep. Here she dwelt, and only Thord for company. They would have gone hungry often that winter but for the folk who came to her with heart-aches and body-ills and problems of conduct. These paid gladly for a slice of her wisdom, and their fees kept Rolf's Farm in food and fuel—these and one other.

The second night after Elin and Thord moved into the hut a knock sounded on the door.

"Who is that?" challenged Thord.

"Is Elin within?" countered a man's voice.

"I am," spoke up Elin.

"Good," said the voice. "Let me in, Elin. Do you remember Aslak the Orkneyman?"

"To my sorrow, I do," she retorted, but she unfastened the door.

Aslak blinked in the firelight as he bent his head to clear the lintel.

"You are cosy and warm," he exclaimed admiringly. "This is better fare than I have. But it is not my purpose to envy you." He perceived Thord glowering at him from the hearth, and grinned at the boy; then instantly sobered. "Do you believe these tales that I slew Geir?" he asked abruptly.

Elin regarded him dispassionately, until he became restless and shuffled his feet on the earthen floor.

"I do not," she answered as abruptly as he had spoken, "but there is no question that you were the means of his bane."

He nodded slowly.

"That I can not deny. But hear me, you and Thord yonder. I had a kindness in my heart for Geir because he used you well. I would not have slain him, save to defend myself. I thought, rather, to kill his horse and then run from him. But it was not to be. I care nothing for

myself, and mightly little for Geir; but I will do anything I may for you."

He paused.

"There is nothing," she replied a trifle less frostily.

"But these two carls who have robbed you and the boy of your portions?" he persisted. "They have told foul stories about me, as well as you. How if I slew them for you, eh? They are still at Geir's stead, the folk say, roystering over their triumph. I could—"

"If you slay them, Aslak," she interrupted, "folk will believe the stories they set afoot. Then, in truth, may it be said that you and I wrought to be rid of Geir and all who stood between us and his property."

Thord jumped up from his stool on the hearth.

"What of that?" he exclaimed. "The property would be ours. We could afford a few tales. And it would be a proper vengeance."

Elin fixed him with her slate-blue eyes that held mysterious depths of knowledge.

"Is it for one who is no kin to us to avenge our wrong?" she asked softly. "When you come to man's estate, my son, will you be proud to have it said as you ride by 'There goes Thord, Geir's son, who is wealthy because Aslak the Baresark slew his half-brother Bjarni and Bjarni's uncle, Herjolf, and hoped thereby to obtain the hand of Thord's mother, having first slain Geir.' Will that make you feel like an honorable man?"

"No," the boy answered sullenly. "I will take my own vengeance."

"That is my thought," she agreed. "You see how matters stand, Aslak?" she turned to the Baresark. "Much harm, unwitting, you have done us. If you slay Bjarni and Herjolf you will put us in very evil case. It might be that Aud would bring suit against us to secure sentence of outlawry. She might claim all Bjarni's inheritance by virtue that her sister was his mother or because there was a betrothal agreement between the families to unite them with Astrid, her daughter. Even if neither of these things happened, we should cease to be victims of malice and should become wrongdoers, man-slayers in intent, if not in deed."

Aslak bowed his head with unaccustomed humility.

"You have schooled me as I deserved, Elin," he said. "What you say is not to be denied. Is there aught else I can do for you? I wot well," he added hastily, "the company of an outlaw would be as dangerous for you as the deed I suggested."

Elin thought a moment.

"There is naught you can do, at this time," she answered finally.

"If there ever is, summon me," he begged. "I shall stay in these parts."

He glanced at Thord, who eyed him now admiringly.

"That is a stout youngling. He has the making of a warrior. Send him to me when he is ready for weapon-training."

He shouldered his ax and strode out of the hut, and Elin and Thord saw him no more; but occasionally when they rose in the morning, they would find a dead sheep or swine or a quarter of beef or a basket of fish tucked up safe on the eaves. And they knew whence it came.

## VI

NOW, six years pass. Most of this time Bjarni was overseas, viking-faring or at the court of the Norse king. He left Iceland by advice of Herjolf, who acted in some sort as his fosterer.

"A man who blinks the truth is a fool, and merits the trouble which comes to him," quoth Herjolf. "There is no gainsaying that we two have won little popularity, but my experience is that men have short memories and all folk, poor and wealthy, are anxious to be at peace with a powerful chief. Therefore I counsel you to fare eastward, and acquire a warrior's reputation. It is only fitting that a young man of your position should travel, so that you may know something of different countries. Geir talked of sending you before he was slain. It

would be fulfilling his wish for you to go, and we will make announcement that it is your purpose to honor him in the journey."

"I do not like to go while that witch is free to work spells against me," objected Bjarni.

"Hut, boy, I shall be here," replied Herjolf. "I shall not be asleep."

"And there is Astrid," continued Bjarni.

But Herjolf swept aside this excuse too.

"By Freya, you can not wed, at her age," he boomed jovially.

"It will be years before we hold the betrothal feast, but when you return next it would be fitting to set out the heirship ale. By then the folk will have become accustomed to Elin's plight, and many will attend who might now answer that they must go upon a journey."

Herjolf had his way, and in the following spring Bjarni sailed east. Harald Greyfell was king in Norway, and for Bjarni's family's sake and because he was big-hearted and wealthy and a stout fighter for his years, he was made welcome at court; and in the summer King Harald loaned him two long-ships and a jarl of experience to teach him, and Bjarni sailed on a Viking raid east into the Baltic.

For three years he lived after this fashion, spending his winters at the king's court, and Viking-faring in the summer. He obtained reputation by his efforts, and was regarded as a chief of promise, although the king was heard once to say:

"He was well named the Grasping, this Icelander. Much he may do, but all he will take that he can."

THE fourth spring after his departure from the Hornfirth dales Bjarni obtained leave from King Harald to fare westward, and he made a swift passage and beached his dragon on his own stead. Herjolf rode over from Borgarhaven, with Aud and Astrid and their two sons, Half the Little and Starkad, to welcome him. Many other men of property came, too, for as Herjolf had predicted, the years had dulled the first burst of indignation over his selfishness toward Elin and Thord. And it was noted by all who saw him that Bjarni had learned the manners of a traveler and warrior of experience. The old men who had wandered far, were glad to talk to him of the countries they knew which he had visited.

The maid Astrid was grown slim and tall. Her eyes were very serious and her speech was slow, and she was shy in men's company—especially, in Bjarni's company. He spoke of this to Herjolf, but Herjolf laughed at him.

"What will you have of a green maid?" gibed his uncle. "She thinks of you—and because she thinks, she fears. But she will grow accustomed to the thought in time, and from that the rest is a short step and a sure."

So Bjarni summoned his friends and neighbors to the *skalli* at Geir's stead to drink the heirship ale, and a great host of them attended, albeit not a few were shamefaced and jeered at him behind his back. Then, having assured himself that his property was in order under Herjolf's supervision, Bjarni took his ship again for Norway and was gone for the space of two more winters. As it chanced, during this visit, he saw none of the three people whose lives were inextricably tangled with his own: Elin, because she was at pains not to cross his path; Thord, because Elin had sent her son on a Greenland voyage to keep him from meeting Bjarni; and Aslak, because the Baresark never came near the dwelling-places of men, except when he needed food or drink, and that would be at night or by stealth.

The lives of these three were very different from his. Poverty they knew, day by day; cold in winter and heat in summer. Aslak, to be sure, seldom raised his hand to work, unless it was to help some farmer who had fed him in the harvest season. But Elin and Thord had never an end to their labor. Mother and son planted and reaped scanty crops, toiled to rear their livestock, and sought employment eagerly from all their neighbors. They knew no luxuries; their clothing

was of the simplest; they were glad for sufficient food to stay their hunger.

Elin must send Thord on the Greenland voyage for that she could not equip him with a sword to stand his ground, boy though he was, if he encountered Bjarni in the road. But all three had this comfort —that they lived their lives as pleased them best. Aslak was an outlaw, and took what he wished from those he disliked. Elin and Thord upheld their pride and strove for a certain purpose.

Of the three Elin was happiest, for she might watch her son waxing splendidly toward manhood, a rangy, lean-hipped, deep-chested youth, his muscles supple, his limbs tireless—a youth sharpened and hardened like a steel blade in the fire of adversity. She was never downcast, but had always a song or a bright saying on her lips; and she bred up this spirit in Thord—Smiling Thord, the folk called him. And every farmer who needed extra labor, every fisherman who could use one more hand, gladly accepted his services. When he had done his mother's stint he roamed the length and breadth of the South Country, from Berufirth to Floi, many days' journey, seeking to earn a penny or a slab of meat or a bag of grain or a jug of ale; and if eventide often found him near Borgarhaven, who would question him, supposing the steadfolk saw him not?

"He grows old young," said Elin, seeing the light in his eyes after these excursions. And it is not to be wondered at there was sorrow blended with the joy in her heart.

## VII

ON A certain day in spring Elin had occasion to go down to the strand to administer to a sick child in one of the fishermen's huts, and while she was there a woman cried at the door that a longship was pulling up the firth. And a little after came by a man who shouted:

"Here is Bjarni Geir's son, and with him a notable company of Easterlings. Much booty has the Grasping."

But Elin gave no thought to this because she was wrestling with death for the child's life, and little it meant to her that there was a great scurrying of messengers to Geir's stead for horses and to Borgarhaven to acquaint Herjolf with Bjarni's return. She wrought on by the bedside until the child's fever was abated, and then took her way home, very weary and forgetful of what had passed. Under her arm she carried a mackerel the fisherman had given her, and she was hoping that Thord would be at the farm for supper to enjoy the treat.

Where the strand way crossed the Geir's stead road she heard a brisk trampling of hoofs and the voices of many men talking. The long column turned a clump of rocks while she stood, hesitating, and she found herself face to face with Bjarni. But a very different Bjarni from the raw youth who had cringed under her spell. He was grown larger than his father had been, three and a quarter ells tall and thick in proportion. He wore the red cloak of one of the Norse king's Guard; on his head was a gilded helm; and a fine shirt of linked mail, silvered, twinkled as the cloak fluttered in the wind. His face was ruddy and weathered, and his hair and beard flashed the same color as his cloak. And his eyes were the cold blue of the northern waters, hard and cruel, even when he laughed.

He saw her, standing by the track, in her old, worn kirtle and ragged cloak, the fish clutched under her arm in its wrapping of seaweed, and for a breath his jaw dropped. Then his lips met in a tight line, and hatred blazed up in his eyes, making their cruelty seem more alive.

"Ho, witch, you still live!" he exclaimed.

"I shall live to bury you for the sake of the father you dishonored," she retorted.

His hand stole to his sword-hilt.

"A threat?" he challenged.

"A promise," she answered steadily.

The column perforce had halted, and Herjolf, by his nephew's side, whispered that he should ride on, aware of the angry looks of the Hornfirth folk, who had

accepted Bjarni's invitation to feast his return.

"What?" men were saying. "Does Bjarni come home to fiout Wise Elin?" "This is an ill deed to assail his father's widow."

"She was no—"

"Ah, what of that? Elin the Wise is above the Grasping."

But Bjarni shook his head at Herjolf, and scowled over his shoulder at the muttering of his neighbors. He bent from the saddle to bring his eyes nearer to Elin, and all the time his fingers played with his sword-hilt.

"Of what account is threat or promise from you, Elin?" he sneered. "You are old and thin, where you were young and sleek. I see wrinkles in your cheeks, and is it my imagination that you did not use to have hands so cracked and soiled?"

She lifted her hands, and examined them.

"Yes," she said calmly, "I am an old woman before my time. I was a princess when your father wed me. He took me against my will, but he atoned for that. As men go, he was kind. It was you, Bjarni the Grasping, who put me to toil and hunger—as all the folk know."

She raised her voice.

"Ho, Hornfirth folk, behold Bjarni the Grasping, who has been overseas to prove his mettle, and would show it to you by hewing down a woman—and that one his father's widow!"

The muttering was louder at the tail of the column, and Herjolf snatched at Bjarni's bridle.

"On, boy, on," he snarled. "There is naught to be gained here."

Bjarni's beard bristled in the excess of his passion and congested blood dyed his face the same hue as his hair.

"Not here, perhaps," he admitted. "But that misbegotten brat of hers shall pay for the witch's insolence. There is not room in Iceland for two of my father's sons."

"That is the truth," said Elin, and her eyes sought his.

He stared at her, but quickly averted his gaze.

"She seeks to spell me," he complained. "By the Hammer, I feel her magic in my veins!"

He made the Sign in protection, and Herjolf and those near him reined hastily aside. Elin laughed a terrible laugh, for she was trying to mask the fear which oppressed her—not fear for herself, but for Thord—young, carefree, weaponless Smiling Thord. She wondered whether Thord was paying one of his surreptitious visits to the copse behind the steadyard at Borgarhaven that afternoon.

She drew the little gold cross from her bosom and raised it in front of Bjarni as she had done once before.

"This is the only magic I know," she said. "And it is the magic of love, not hate. Yes, I spell you by the love the folk bear me, Bjarni, and by the love they bear my son. Touch us, if you dare!"

She walked on across the track, under his horse's nose, and all that could be heard was the stamping of hoofs and the clink of mail as men restlessly shifted position. Bjarni winged a curse after her stooped shoulders. But Herjolf turned in his saddle, and shouted jovially:

"Well, we have won a passage, carls! On to the ale-horns!"

And he murmured angrily to Bjarni:

"Smile, fool, smile! Will you let them think she curbed you? Make a jest! Be merry! Pretend you were but baiting her! Would you lose all you have gained in six years?"

So Bjarni roused himself from the sour rage that convulsed him and strove to belittle the sorry scene.

"So much for a witch! When they talk of spells give them little heed. It is what they do in secret that nips a man's marrow, eh?"

But one of the small land-holders of the district spoke out boldly in answer.

"She is a good woman, Elin. The folk call her the Wise. She helps all who ask her. You will not establish yourself, Bjarni, by abusing her or Thord who minds his own affairs and works harder than any youth in the Quarter."

Bjarni scowled at this man, his patience at the bursting point.

"I am not come hither from the king's court to be lessoned by you, carl. Give us peace of your chatter! This Elin may be wise, but she cozened my father, and would have cozened Herjolf and me, had we allowed her. As to Thord, let him look to himself. I'll have no one befouling my rights. It would be better for all concerned if Elin and Thord were sent out of Iceland."

"No doubt, no doubt," Herjolf agreed hastily. "But here is no reason for quarrel, friends. It is a family matter."

But the man who had rebuked Bjarni and several more withdrew from the column, and of those who rode on to Geir's stead many held to the same opinion, but for sake of policy or interest feared to give Bjarni open offense. Men said Bjarni had made an ill beginning in Iceland, and all looked to see what would happen when he and Thord met.

## VIII

FEAR stabbed at Elin's heart as she climbed the path to Rolf's Farm, comparing in her mind the giant figure of Bjarni, splendid in his war-gear, sursounded by friends and house-carls, with Thord's youthful stature, naked and unprotected. Thord was no weakling, but he lacked seven years of Bjarni's age and better than a span of his half-brother's height. And Bjarni, she knew, was trained to weapon-work, a redoubtable warrior who had held his own with kings and jarls and famous champions. Thord was more accustomed to tugging at an oar or guiding a plough across the furrows; what little practise he had with sword and spear was due to the kindness of old farmers who had been Viking-farers in past days and could not resist an opportunity to school a likely lad.

She shivered, remembering the cruel look in Bjarni's close-set eyes. Whatever Herjolf counseled, whatever the Hornfirth folk might say, she was convinced Bjarni intended to slay Thord the first time their ways crossed. From boyhood red brother had hated dark brother. That hatred had been spontaneous, inevitable. And now it must be emphasized by the Grasping's dread lest Thord be able to assert a legitimate claim to their father's property. Ah, and what if Bjarni learned of those visits to Borgarhaven? What if Astrid rebelled against his wooing?

Elin stayed her feet, aghast at the thought. Why, of course, Astrid must rebel! She recalled her own plight—forced to wed, unwilling. How much worse the fate of Astrid, flung into Bjarni's arms, loving another. That was something she, Elin, had been spared. To wed, unloving, was bad enough. But to wed, loving another—ah, that was unspeakable! And that other, Thord—her Thord, Smiling Thord!—Thord, who had been denied so much, who had never complained. Thord, who stood this day in the shadow of death by his red brother's hand.

She walked on, thinking deeply. The time had come to act, she decided. It was useless to count the risks. Rather she and Thord should perish than suffer love to be filched from them as well as land and money. But what should she do? Always, she recognized, she had looked to find a way to recover her son's inheritance. But how? What tools, what weapons might they obtain, under the handicap of their poverty?

IT WAS dusk when she reached her hut, with her questions unanswered. She was entering the low doorway, when she noticed an object wedged in the roof-thatch, and putting up her hand, drew down a swine's ham. She recognized it as one of Aslak's gifts, and it reminded her of the Baresark's offer of aid. The one fighting man she could call upon! But what could an outlaw do to help her in this situation? Slay Bjarni? She revolted at the idea of assassination. It would be one thing for Thord to slay his evil brother, but an unmanly act to allow Aslak to do the deed for him. Nor

would it benefit Thord, she surmised.

Then a plan occurred to her, and she crouched upon the doorstep, hugging her knees, eyes fixed on the shadowy loom of the *jokulls*, thinking, thinking, thinking. When dragging footsteps sounded on the path, her plan was fully formed.

"You walk as if you carried a heavy load, my son," she called into the darkness.

"A load of sorrow, mother," Thord answered dolefully. "Bjarni is home."

"I have seen him," she replied. "Did you—"

"No." He emerged from the night and sat on the ground at her feet. "I—I was at Borgarhaven—in the morning."

"So I guessed," she said.

"Astrid—she—we are of one mind, mother—of one heart. She—while we talked together one came running from the stead crying for her—that Herjolf and Aud rode for Geir's stead—that Bjarni was returned."

Elin waited silently for him to continue, as he did presently:

"So she went. That was a *doegr's** time since. I followed and waited—behind the ricks in the yard at Geir's stead. Do you remember?"

"Yes," she answered. "It was I had them changed there, so that they might have better protection from the wet."

He nodded slowly.

"What the stead is I think you made it, Mother. Well, I heard the sound of the feasting. Bjarni was boasting of his deeds—how he slew two Englishmen by himself, and cleared a Daneman's longship, and fared east to Gardariki †—he had a gold band on his head the king of that country gave him. So I whistled the seabird's call that is the signal between Astrid and me—and—and after a while—she came. Her kirtle was blue—and she slipped into my arms almost before I saw her."

He groaned.

"Oh, Mother! Oh, Mother!"

Elin dropped her hand on the black head at her knee.

"Yes, my son?"

"Herjolf—Bjarni—the betrothal feast is set for the week before the Thingfaring. She—she is to ride with Bjarni when he goes to Almannagjaa."

Now, Elin said naught for another while, listening to Thord's steady breathing, her fingers caressing the heavy locks of his hair.

"Would you venture death for her?" she asked finally.

He looked up, surprized.

"Death? What is death that I should fear it? All we had Bjarni has taken from us. Whatever betides, I will not sit patient under this. But—but—without weapon—"

"There is a way," she said. "It is a hard way and a dangerous. But it is my thought that you are man enough to follow it, despite your youth. You tarry a moment, my son, and study yourself. Life is long. If you let Astrid go, another maid may—"

"No, no," he cried.

"She is older than you. Think! You are scarce more than a boy."

"Men have worn crowns and fought battles before my age," he returned proudly. "Yes, and begotten sons. It is not the years, but the will, that makes the man."

Elin bent and kissed his brow.

"Well spoken, Thord," she said. "You must win yourself another name than the Smiling. That was sufficient for a boy, but you shall be a warrior, with a reputation becoming your race, or—or—die with honor."

He sprang up excitedly.

"That is my wish, Mother. But what is this way you spoke of? I care not how hard it is or how dangerous. Give me a sword, that is all I ask. Show me how I may punish Bjarni!"

"You have not forgotten Aslak the Baresark?" she asked.

She sensed, rather than saw, how his face fell.

"Yes, but he is an outlaw. And one man—"

"He is not an ordinary man. And he

*Twelve hours. † Russia.

has a sword, Gray Maiden, which has great powers. He told me once that it is reputed whoever wields it may not be slain by steel. Also, he is more skilled in weapon-craft than any man in Iceland. Go to him and say you come from me. Ask him to lend you Gray Maiden."

"But he will not," expostulated Thord. "No man would. It would break his luck."

"I do not think that he will do so willingly," she replied calmly. "But I will show you how you may win it from him without doing him any hurt. For I would not hurt Aslak, since he has been kind to me and likewise because I have need for his testimony. You will require a man to guard your back on the venture I have in mind, and that is another reason for sparing him."

Thord regarded her in bewilderment.

"You speak with a confidence I do not feel, albeit I have no fear, Mother," he said.

"Heed me and you will understand," she replied. "Your one chance of securing justice against Bjarni and of staying him from wedding Astrid is to slay him lawfully in single combat—in *holmgang*. And you shall do it in this wise—"

It was late in the night when she ceased speaking, and Thord assisted her to rise. He stood before her very humbly.

"Whatever name I may win, Mother, it will not be as honorable as yours," he said. "You are rightly named the Wise."

She kissed him, her heart too full for speech. For her thought was this: "If I send him to defeat I shall be his bane, and if I send him to victory I thrust him into Astrid's arms. In either case I lose him. Woe is my lot!"

## IX

THORD set out in the morning, a bag of food on his shoulder and gladness in his heart. He felt that he was at last a man, and by way of becoming a warrior of whom *scalds* should recite rhymes and tales by the hearth-fires for years to come. With a smiling face and bright words on her lips, Elin saw him go, but when he passed the lip of the fell she turned back into her hut and sat by the fire and let down her hair and wept, with the quiet grief of a woman whose life has turned the corner into the lonely dales of age. So we leave her.

Thord's path lay over Stafafell. On his left hand towered the gigantic mass of the Vatna Jokull, its rocky wastes stretching away as far as could be seen. Some said that Aslak's hiding-place was in one of the ravines which projected like fingertips from the mountain's immensity, but Elin had been sure that the Baresark would not den so close to the haunts of men. She advised Thord to inquire of the shepherds and wayfarers he encountered whether they had seen Aslak or had knowledge of his resort. It might take time, but soon or late either he would find Aslak or Aslak would hear of his inquiries and seek him out.

So Thord strode sturdily along, greeting all he chanced to meet and never failing in his question—

"Have you seen Aslak Flatnose in these dales, carl?"

And shepherd or farmer or traveler—passing, belike, from Berarstead on Lagarfleet to Hornfirth—would answer in much the same words:

"What? The Baresark? You are like to have a warm welcome, Thord. No, we have not seen him. As well chase a shadow in the night!"

That evening Thord slept with a shepherd on Oxenlava, who admitted he had seen Aslak faring toward Hornfirth several days past, but had not noticed the Baresark's return. He recommended Thord to several friends in Fleetdale, and from these folk Thord received much the same information during his second day's search. All knew Aslak but professed ignorance of his whereabouts. One expressed the opinion that the Baresark dwelt in the neighborhood of Snaefell, beyond the Fleetwater, and with this to go upon, Thord headed inland the third day.

The country was the most desolate he had ever seen. A spur of the Vatna Jokull intervened, now, betwixt him and the Hornfirth dales; and a man might wander the whole day and never see a human face, although the shepherds were agreed that the wilderness maintained a sinister population of trolls and other evil spirits. They were full of tales of men and maidens who had disappeared, and several claimed there was reason to suppose Aslak in league with the demons. How else was the Baresark immune from the perils which befell ordinary folk?

So that night, when Thord bedded beneath an overhanging rock, he repeated a prayer Elin had taught him and arranged a number of pebbles in the form of a cross by his side. It was very still, high up there on Snaefell, the *jokull* peaks hulking like half-seen, grotesque monsters across the pale northern sky, and he listened for the scream of demon voices; but all he heard was the chatter of a branch of the headwaters of the Heradsfloi, clinking over its boulder-strewn bed on the first stage of its descent through the *jokull* dales. Then he slept, and in the morning awoke unharmed.

This day, again, he saw no one until close to evening, when he encountered a shepherd, a very old, withered man, who looked at him with suspicion when he propounded his usual question.

"And what will you seek of Aslak?" demanded the shepherd.

"I have a message for him."

"Who sends it?"

"I see that you do not know me," Thord replied patiently. "I am Thord Geir's son, and my mother is Elin, whom the Hornfirth folk call the Wise. I bear her message."

The shepherd stared hard at him.

"Elin! She was the maid cast ashore with Aslak. Humph! Yes, the maid Geir wedded against her will. You are brother to Bjarni Geir's son, who is called the Grasping."

"Half-brother," corrected Thord.

The shepherd stroked his long beard and deliberated further.

"Humph! It is to be seen that you are unarmed. Bide here two days."

"But I am seeking Aslak—"

"Bide here two days."

"You know where the Baresark—"

"Bide here two days."

And not a word more would the old carl say. So Thord sat himself down in that spot on desolate Snaefell and waited the night, the next day and night and a part of the ensueing day. It was past noon when a voice hailed him from the mouth of a ravine, and Aslak appeared, a wild figure dressed in sheepskins, hairy as Herjolf's self, the sword Gray Maiden at his belt and the ax of blue steel resting on his shoulder. He was no longer a young man, but he walked with the quick, firm tread of one who does not tire easily. He had a chest as round as a barrel, and if he was not so huge as Bjarni, yet he was a thought stouter than Thord, massive as the *jokulls* among which he dwelt. A champion.

"So you are Thord," he cried in a voice that boomed like the wind in a sail. "I have seen you from afar, youngling; but never close enough to judge how you have grown."

"I am not so large as some," replied Thord, gathering his wits for what must follow.

"No, you are of your father's build, and that means you are bitling to me—and to Bjarni, too, eh?"

"Bjarni is as much bigger than you as you are bigger than I," said Thord. "He returned to Geir's stead a few days ago—the day you left the ham for my mother."

"Ho, did he?" exclaimed Aslak. "Ill tidings! I wish I had tarried. I might have put sword or ax to that red head of his."

"That is for me to do," declared Thord.

"For you, bantling? And how will you come by it? For I guess you to be no warrior, as yet—which is no fault of your own."

"It was for that reason my mother sent me to you."

"To be taught weapon-craft?" Aslak nodded sagely. "I remember I made such

an offer to her, six years back, after Geir and I had that unlucky bicker. Well, well! That is best forgotten. Will you begin with sword or ax?"

Thord cleared his throat, resolved to plunge without delay into the true intent of his mission.

"There is not time for much of that, Aslak," he answered. "It was the thought of my mother that you would lend me your sword."

"Gray Maiden?" Aslak gaped in amazement. "Boy, you are mad! No hand but mine touches Gray Maiden, until Odin sends the Valkyrs for me. Hut! It is unlucky for another hand to draw it. See what befell Geir!"

"Nevertheless, I must have it," Thord persisted doggedly. "I must challenge Bjarni to fight in *holmgang*, and to win against him I require Gray Maiden."

"Come, come," remonstrated the Baresark, "I'll fight him for you."

"That can not be, for the reasons my mother gave you once before. Also, in this case, I must fight Bjarni, not only for my rights and my mother's vindication, but to save Astrid Herjolf's dotter—he seeks to wed her and the betrothal feast is set."

"Hutatut!" growled Aslak. "Here is a mad youngling! And cause enough for a lifetime of feuds and blood-lettings. I am for you, Thord, and for Elin; but not for you or Elin would I let Gray Maiden pass out of my hands."

"So my mother said," replied Thord. "I will do as she bid me, and fight you for the sword."

Aslak sat down on a rock and wiped a mighty hand across his brow.

"Fight me?" he asked weakly. "You?"

"If you are larger than I, I am younger," asserted Thord.

"For less than that, boy, I have slain men." And Aslak's scowl was as ferocious as Bjarni's. "But have done! I will not harm your mother's son—or any boastful bitling, who finds satisfaction in raising his first crow. So think of another plan."

"There is no other plan," insisted Thord. "I must fight you for the sword. You can not refuse me in honor, seeing that you are armed, while I—"

Aslak bounded up with a bellow of rage.

"Who are you to talk to me of honor? Honor—because I will not slay you out of hand and save Bjarni the effort! Do not try me too far."

"I do not seek to try you, but to fight you," Thord explained reasonably. "Bethink you, Aslak, if I do not procure the means to thwart Bjarni in wedding Astrid and regain my property, I might as well be dead. And if it be at your hands, why, that is of small account to me. So I pray you, have at me, and give me the chance to win the sword."

Now the Baresark surveyed him grimly.

"With what do you propose to fight me?" Aslak inquired.

Thord unslung the bag in which he carried his store of food, and removed from it a length of hide-rope, very strong and supple, to either end of which was fastened a cow's hoof. And then he proceeded to discard his jerkin and breeches, so that he stood only in his shoon and drawers. Meantime, Aslak stared as if his eyes would pop out of his head.

"You—you mean to fight me with that rope?" demanded the Baresark.

"Yes."

"What can you do with it?" scoffed Aslak. "Do you think to strangle me?"

"No, for my mother charged me not to injure you."

The Baresark made the Sign of the Hammer. He was dazed, no longer scornful, a little resentful.

"It is an ill deed, boy, to mock an older man, a proven warrior."

"Here is no mockery," quoth Thord. "It is my necessity urges me—and my mother's. If you will lend me your sword—"

"That would serve neither of us," retorted the Baresark. "It would mean only bad luck, I tell you. Gray Maiden is true to one man at a time. Well, I will try not to injure you. But the sword is a thirsty wench."

He shook his head sorrowfully and started to lay his ax on a boulder.

"Here," he offered, suddenly changing his mind. "Take Skullshaver. It won't help you against Gray Maiden, but I can't bring myself to hew at a defenseless man."

"That is a generous offer," replied Thord. "But I will fight as I had planned. I should be no match for you with the ax."

The Baresark bellowed his exasperation.

"And that is the truth! With the ax or any weapon! This fight neither of us will find pleasure in remembering. Look to yourself. If I can stop Gray Maiden in time, I will save you; but—"

He rushed abruptly at Thord, the sword wheeling in an arc of gray steel; and Thord retreated, swinging the length of rope by its middle, so that the weighted ends were revolving over his head. Youth against experience—cow's hoofs against steel!

"Stand still," cried Aslak.

"That is not the way to fight in this manner," Thord answered, and continued retreating warily out of the long sword's deadly sweep, his rope twirling ceaselessly.

The Baresark pulled up, snorting disgustedly.

"A poor business, youngling! Come, take the ax and fight or—"

Thord struck with appalling swiftness. Leaping in to close quarters, he whirled the weighted ends of his rope around Aslak's sword-arm; the Baresark instinctively jumped back. Thord pulled on the rope, gave it a twist—and a quick spurt of pain made Aslak's fingers open. Gray Maiden clanked on the rocks between them, and in the one motion Thord stooped and seized it, released the rope and sprang clear.

"I have it," he said, trying not to seem as proud as he was. "But it shall be yours again—so why should we fight?"

The Baresark peered down at the contrivance which had snared him, and the startled look in his face became imbued with superstitious awe.

"No, no, Thord," he answered, "we will not fight. And as for Gray Maiden, she is yours. She would not have left me so, if she had not wearied of me. I suppose I did not give her the drink she craved. So it is! A man is young—and waxes old. In your hands she will fare better, for I see that you are not without guile, and that is to the credit of any warrior."

Thord looked shamefaced.

"It was my mother's trick—"

"Ah, yes, but you wrought it. A keen eye and a sure hand, youngling. You will make a fighting man of note, even as I predicted."

"If you will help me," said Thord awkwardly. "I have but begun my endeavor."

Aslak extended his hand.

"By the steel that fathered me, I am your dog! Outlaw or inlaw, I stand by him who wrenched Gray Maiden from me, without holding weapon in his hand. Come, Thord, we will arrange it so, with Elin's wit to aid us, that Bjarni's wealth and strength shall yield him little good. I perceive a task after my own heart. Ha, this is fate! It is doom, boy! The Gods willed this. Not for nothing was I cast ashore in Elin's company, and Gray Maiden bound fast in her sheath at my belt. It was not accident that you were born—or that Gray Maiden, sped by my arm, should be Geir's bane. I tell you the sword came into Iceland for a purpose—as Elin and I came safe ashore, alone of fourscore souls."

## X

ALL the Hornfirth folk rode to the betrothal feast. Herjolf's *skalli* resounded with the din of the feasting, for here was more good feeling shown than at any time since Bjarni's return, and this because Astrid was well liked and men said the Grasping would be more amenable when tied to a wife. So there was shouting of songs and boasting of exploits and comparing of heroes all up and down the lines of benches; clicking of ale-horns

in salutation, rapping of marrow-bones on the board-tables, shuffling of feet of the serving-folk as they sped hither and yon satisfying the needs of the guests. And on the cross-benches at the east end of the hall the buzz of women's voices was scarce lower than the men's, but here the talk was not of trade and fighting, but of the bride's woebegone face and the hard look in Aud's eyes.

"The maid has been weeping!"

"Who? Astrid?"

"Who else?"

"Why should she, gossips? Bjarni is a stout champion, and a wealthy."

"What is wealth without heart's craving?"

"What right has a woman to judge her man before she has known him?"

"True! Well spoken! It is ill done, if maids begin to hunger for love before wedding."

"Ah, no! Freya knows we women are hard put to it by fathers who think first of the husband's property and last of his kindliness."

"Yes, there is reason in that. And Bjarni has little kindliness."

"As much as Aud. It took Elin's wit to name her the Treacherous.

"What of Elin in this? And Thord?"

"'Tis no concern of theirs. The men say Thord has fled the country."

"Well, he might, poor lad, and no dishonor to him."

On the high seat, midway of the south wall where ran the upper bench, Bjarni sat by Herjolf, his red face twisted in a sullen scowl, his ale-horn never full. Herjolf, too, beneath his hearty manner, was puzzled and perturbed.

"I tell you, I like it not, foster-father," growled Bjarni.

"Loki snatch me, if I understand," said Herjolf. "She never showed this feeling before you came home."

"Better push to a finish," urged the Grasping. "Pay over the bride-money, and let we two ride for Geir's stead."

"Bide, bide," counseled Herjolf. "If there is undue haste, the folk will remark it. Already there is whispering and head-nodding on the cross-benches."

"The more reason to be through with this." Bjarni waved a hand toward the smoky turmoil of the *skalli*. "Let us go, and there will be the less occasion for talk."

"No," resisted Herjolf. "Belike, she will weep. Wait until dark and—"

There was a sudden swirl in front of the Men's Door at the west end of the hall, and steel flashed over the heads of guests and serving-folk. Men tumbled right and left; a thrall-woman shrieked; a bench was upset; voices exclaimed and protested.

"Way," shouted a gruff voice. "Gangway, there! Out of the way, fools. We will not harm you."

Both Herjolf and Bjarni started to their feet. In the high seat on the cross-bench Astrid leaned forward, the color rising in her wan cheeks, an expression of unbelief, tinged by fear, in her eyes. Aud was equally startled, but her face mirrored anger and annoyance.

"Who comes?" called Herjolf. "Name yourselves. Is it necessary for you to bare steel at the betrothal feast?"

A riot of voices answered as the strangers slowly forced a passage.

"It is Thord!"

"Aslak the Baresark!"

"They have Elin with them!"

And now all the folk might see the little group, Thord in front, a long gray sword flashing in his right hand, his left guiding his mother up the hall, and Aslak striding behind them, the ax Skullshaver a blue flame on his shoulder. Elin looked proudly, almost haughtily, at those she passed. She held herself very erect, and her eyes shone with a light no man might face.

"The witch!" cried Bjarni. "What do you seek, witch?"

"My son is come to demand justice," she answered curtly.

"With an outlaw to aid him," amended Herjolf. "I see Aslak at your back, and it is known to all that he has stolen and slain from one end of Iceland to the other."

"As to the slaying," rumbled Aslak before Elin could speak, "it is true I have cropped a few heads that deserved it, whatever the law-men might say; and I have lifted a sheep now and then from those who could afford it, by way of punishing them for the thieving they did upon folk who were not so powerful." He eyed Herjolf tolerantly. "Yes, I have taken many a sheep from your folds, False One."

There was a faint bubbling of laughter in the back-benches, for every man present had had dealings at some time with Herjolf and knew how hard he was in compelling the terms his wealth made it possible for him to secure. But Elin stopped Aslak when the Baresark would have continued.

"Aslak is come hither as my witness," she said.

"A witness to what?" asked Herjolf angrily. "What has that to do with Thord's demanding justice? I think you have come seeking manslaughter."

"And little good shall it do you," Bjarni added grimly. "For none of you leaves this hall alive."

He made to vault over the table, and there was a scattering of men from his path; but he paused as Thord spoke.

"Hear me, all you people," announced Thord. "I am come to demand of Bjarni, Geir's son, the half of our father's property which he has wrongfully withheld from me."

"To what purpose?" scoffed Bjarni. "It has been established that you are baseborn. Elin, your mother, entered this house as a thrall, in the clothes she wore and possessing naught else."

Now Elin spoke again.

"I am, and was born a free woman," she said calmly. "And Geir took me to wife, as Aslak shall testify. Not otherwise would I have gone to him, nor would Aslak have suffered it."

Bjarni laughed sneeringly.

"A likely tale! And a known thief and outlaw to bolster it!"

"Touching Aslak's outlawry," replied Thord, "I make myself responsible for it. When I have obtained justice from Bjarni I will pay any fines assessed against Aslak, and the complainant shall set his own price."

"A fair promise," mocked Herjolf, "seeing that you are penniless as you stand here, Thord, and shall be lifeless a few moments hence."

"That is to be proven," Thord answered steadily. "I appeal to the folk here to see justice done. I have dwelt among them my life long, and I ask any man to say whether my mother or I have wrought injury to a soul in Iceland."

Several men cried out denial and their boldness encouraged others to give similar testimony.

"It is well known, Thord!"

"They are good folk, Thord and Elin."

"Give the boy justice."

And then a great roar from every corner of the *skalli*, women's voices shrilling through the men's. Astrid, on the cross-bench, staring starry-eyed at the sturdy showing her champion made cried:

"Justice! Justice for Thord! Justice for Thord and Elin! Justice!"

Bjarni ripped his sword from its sheath, and he swept the hall with a ferocious glance that marked those who shouted loudest:

"It is in this spirit you come to my betrothal feast! I shall remember it, Hornfirth folk. When the harvest fails, when your cattle die, when the fever-blight assails your children—then come to me and ask aid. Come, and hear my answer!"

The shouting dwindled to a frightened silence, for there was no doubt in the minds of the Hornfirth folk that Bjarni had the power to cause suffering in every stead. So they sat back, and eyed one another uneasily, half of a mind to believe they had made fools of themselves.

Aud spoke acidly from the cross-bench, holding tightly one of Astrid's wrists, so tight her grip that the girl winced:

"Here is much neighborly feeling, husband! It has been said that those who confer favor may look first for ingratitude, so we need not be surprized. But at the same time we should not permit

Thord to ride roughshod over the legal rights of our son-in-law. You and I had speech with Elin after Geir was slain by Aslak, the very witness she now brings forward in proof that Geir took her to wife, and we know that she had no proof to offer then. I do not see what profit will come of this business, yet if Thord is so foolish as to meet Bjarni in the open Bjarni would be equally foolish not to accept the challenge and slay him."

Thord took a step toward her, and the fire in his eye dimmed only when his gaze slipped from Aud's cold features to Astrid, pinned down in her seat by her mother's cruel grasp.

"I remember how Aud persecuted my mother that day after Geir was laid in hough," he answered boyishly stern. "The three of them hated us for the one reason: Bjarni wished all Geir's property for himself, and Aud and Herjolf desired the same thing because they would have Bjarni wed Astrid—" he paused—"against her will."

Aud leaned across the table, her eyes glittering snakily; Bjarni and Herjolf frowned, dumbfounded.

"So!" hissed Aud. "It is to you we look, Thord, for Astrid's tears and protests!"

And she twisted Astrid's wrist until the maid wept. But Thord might not see this because Bjarni had vaulted the table from the high seat and alighted on the floor rushes near where he stood. Once more men tumbled over each other in their haste to get from under the feet of the champions. Aslak, ax poised to strike at need, took position at Thord's back, and cast a keen eye around the near-by benches. Elin stood to one side.

But Thord raised his sword in a gesture for attention.

"Hear me, Hornfirth folk! I, Thord Geir's son, being deprived of my just inheritance by Bjarni Geir's son, who has also cast dishonor upon my mother, Elin, who was Geir's wife, do challenge Bjarni Geir's son to fight me on this issue in *holmgang*. It is my right to challenge, and so I do challenge—and if he does not fight me on these terms, he is niding, and thereby forfeits the rights I challenge."

"I fight you, now, baseborn," snarled Bjarni, and he would have rushed at Thord, but that Herjolf called to him, and there were still folk in his path.

"Bide, Bjarni," advised Herjolf. "I say naught against the slaying of these folk, and if you will wait I will have in my house-carls, and we will finish them; but there is no occasion for you to meet Thord in *holmgang*. If he wished to challenge you he should have done so six years past when Geir died, and we settled the inheritance."

Thord laughed aloud, with a savage mirth that sat ill on his young face.

"Six years ago," he answered, "I was a boy, not half-grown. Bjarni was a man older than I am today. Could I have challenged him? Ho, Hornfirth folk, you are freemen, Icelanders, who deal justice evenly, man to man! I ask you—is not a man who argues so putting himself in the wrong? Could a boy of twelve years challenge a youth of nineteen to *holmgang*? And would Bjarni and Herjolf and Aud have plotted against us as they did if I had been able to defend our rights?"

For the second time a roar of approval broke from the crowded *skalli*. The Hornfirth folk might fear the wealth and power of Bjarni and Herjolf, but their elemental sense of justice triumphed over the temptation to stand aside from Thord's quarrel. Likewise, here was a case which might set a precedent in future years. Every man saw that if the right of trial in *holmgang* was limited they could never be certain of obtaining justice. Cravens, especially, all cunning fellows, would exploit such an advantage.

"*Holmgang!*" was the shout. "Let Bjarni take up Thord's challenge. Justice for Smiling Thord!"

Herjolf, never willing to venture against odds, sank back in his seat, biting his fingers, pulling at his beard. Bjarni thought only of slaying Thord.

"Bah," he shouted. "Too long have I suffered the witch and her brat to live.

Why wait for *holmgang*? I can slay him as well here."

And he leaped at Thord, but both Elin and Aslak came between them, and when he would have cut at Elin the Baresark's ax struck up his blade.

"Have a care," rasped Aslak. "I would save you for Thord, carl, but—"

Bjarni gave ground, not liking the red glare in Aslak's eye. He was as brave as most men, but few men cared to do battle with a Baresark—and they unmailed.

"The challenge was to fight in *holmgang*," Elin appealed to the bystanders. "This is not *holmgang*. There is little room for footwork."

"True," agreed Aslak, "and the lighter man requires the room. But I do not think we need worry." He grinned derisively at Bjarni, with confidential amusement at the serried ranks of men standing back against the walls on tables and benches. "Thord has a sword that—well, carls, it is a sword."

"He has the right," Elin corrected gently. "But there must be no reason for Herjolf or another to claim the fight was unfair."

"All I seek is the fight," snapped Bjarni. "Have done with talk."

"No, no, one thing more," cried Thord. "I ask the folk to protect my mother and Aslak. If I should fall—which I will not—"

A shout answered him.

"Well said, Thord!"

"Hew, and fear not."

"Elin shall go free."

"We'll guard the Baresark."

"The Baresark guards himself," retorted Aslak.

He let his ax hang loose from its wrist-thong, caught Elin under the arm-pits and swung her off the floor on to one of the tables, where men readily made a space for her. But she still persisted in asserting her point.

"This is a fight in *holmgang*," she cried. "It is a fight to prove Thord's cause."

"*Holmgang!*" agreed the spectators. "It is a fight in *holmgang!*"

Even the women on the cross-benches leaned over their tables, wrapt in the clash of the two champions; but of them all none watched more closely than Astrid. And as Bjarni sprang at Thord, and Thord met him foot to foot, with a clatter and clang of steel that sent the sparks flying to the rafters, she wrenched her hand loose from her mother and gained her feet, eyes a-shine, cheeks crimson.

"Hew on, Thord!" she called. "Astrid for Thord! Hew, lad, hew!"

And the *skalli* echoed her, discretion forgotten.

"Hew, Thord, hew! Justice for Thord! Justice!"

Aud clawed at Astrid, and sought to pull her down, but the girl repelled her mother, and other women spoke so sharply that Aud cowered, dazed by the turn of events. On the high seat Herjolf was in like case, chewing at his fingers, mumbling in his beard. For what did he see but Thord darting and striking with a speed and sureness that roused the enthusiasm of every fighting man present; the gray sword a flicker of lightning, his strong young limbs carrying him here and there, now inside the sweep of Bjarni's blade, now far out of its range!

Bjarni was in a rage, fuming at the lack of instant success he had anticipated. He cursed and howled as Thord clipped him in the thigh and then danced away

"Hold still, jumping-jack! Do you fear the steel?"

"Do you?" countered Thord, and nicked his shoulder.

Panting and foaming, for he had drunk deep and his belly was soggy, Bjarni forced himself to a speed approaching Thord's and tried to exploit his superior height for one of those terrible strokes of which there is no parrying; but always the sword Gray Maiden flickered beneath his steel, and Thord's lithe muscles resisted his battering strength.

The *skalli* went wild, and the blood-lust was kindled, so that if the guests had not been of practically the same

mind there must have been such a folk-slaying as the sagamen had never recited.

"Hew, Thord, hew!"

"At his head, youngling!"

"Well struck!"

"Under his arm-pit!"

There were but two who kept silence. Aslak leaned on his ax, eyes intent on the flying figures. Elin stood, with hands clasped on front of her, and in them the little gold cross. Her eyes, too, were on the pair who leaped and whirled and charged and retreated in a flickering maze of steel. Yet she seemed to see something else, beyond them, something that was beyond time and place.

Thord now was confident he had Bjarni's measure. No longer did he dart away before his half-brother's bull-rushes. He countered Bjarni's strokes by might of arm and weapon skill, and the shouts of applause threatened to lift the roof-beams. Gray Maiden heaved and swung, thrust and parried, cut and hacked, as if the blade were a part of him. Bjarni was bleeding from several cuts, and the folk commenced to realize that Thord was playing with him. Laughter spiced the applause. And Bjarni became insane. He abandoned all caution, heedless of his own fate, if he might slay Thord, who ignored this recklessness, warding every attack with mocking ease.

"Be merciful, my son!"

Elin's voice carried, distinct in all the hubbub, and Bjarni faltered, his sword poised overhead.

"The witch spells me," he muttered.

Then Thord struck, a low, sweeping stroke that caught Bjarni in mid-thigh and hewed his legs from under him, and Bjarni crashed down on the floor-rushes, his stumps spouting blood; but he clutched at an overturned bench and pulled himself erect for a moment, his sword yet poised for the blow he had not dealt.

His eyes fixed Elin's, malignant, hateful, defiant.

"Your doing, witch!" he gasped. "Come with me!"

He hurled his sword straight at her breast. It turned once in air, hilt over point, and flew straight as an arrow, a flash of light in the dimness, sped by the last strength of his body even as he collapsed in death. But Gray Maiden flew faster. Thord cast the long blade like an ax, and once more it parried Bjarni's blow. The two swords clattered at Elin's feet.

Aslak sprang to pick them up.

"What said I, Thord?" exclaimed the Baresark, tendering Gray Maiden. "It was not for nothing this sword and I and Elin came into Iceland together. There was fate in it! The Norns spun our skeins with the one bobbin."

But none heeded Aslak. The folk in the *skalli* were shouting—

"Hewing Thord!"

"Well struck, Thord!"

"Well hewed!"

And the women on the cross-benches were helping Astrid to climb to the floor, and Thord was trying to make his way to meet her, Gray Maiden dripping in his hand.

Aslak was quick to perceive the situation.

"Way for Thord," he commanded lustily, brandishing Skullshaver aloft. "Gangway for Hewing Thord!"

And the folk parted before them, so that Thord took Astrid in his arms under the high seat where Herjolf gloomed. Aud had fled, tears of rage in her cold eyes.

From the north side of the hall Elin watched what passed, and if her heart ached, she curbed her feelings with resolute courage. Youth to youth! It was as it should be.

"Herjolf!" she called.

The folk turned toward her. Herjolf ceased chewing his fingers and eyed her shiftily, conscious the tide of opinion flooded against him, fearful of Bjarni's fate.

"This was a betrothal feast," she went on when she had attention. "It was ill-planned, but that has been remedied. It would be discourteous of us to slight your hospitality, so I counsel you that we

continue the feast. I seem to see a blither look in Astrid's face, and—"

The laughter of the Hornfirth folk drowned out her voice.

"Well wooed, Thord," they cried. "Ho, what a wooing!"

"I suppose it must be," said Herjolf sulkily.

"Yes," agreed Aslak in the same tone. "It must be."

"Ho, ho, ho," shouted the Hornfirthers. "A rare jest! Thord's wooing! Ho, ho, ho! Pay down the maid's portion, Herjolf. More ale! More ale!"

## XI

THORD after this was known as Hewing Thord, and he was one of the most famous men in Iceland. He kept the sword Gray Maiden until his death, and much glory he won with it, both in outfaring and infaring. So highly was he regarded that when Olaf Tryggvi's son became king in Norway he sent word to Iceland that he wished Thord to visit him that he might do proper honor to one whose deeds had carried across the Western Ocean; and the *scalds* tell how Thord assisted King Olaf in many exploits.

He lived to a considerable age and he and Astrid had many children. From them descended several lines of worthy folk, warriors, *scalds*, seafarers and priests, who were settled in the south of Iceland. The most noted of these was Snorre Sturla's son, who collected the "Heimskringla Sagas," which tell of the deeds of the kings of Norway.

When King Olaf, of blessed memory, dispatched Thangbrand Willibald's son to preach the White Christ in Iceland none helped Thangbrand more than Thord, and Elin was not behind her son in bringing the people to accept the new faith. It was she who set Aslak to slay Arne Dag's son, of the White River dales, when he told the folk at the Allthing that it would not profit them to turn from Odin's worship and the Old Gods. Aslak earned much sanctity by this and other slayings in behalf of the new faith, and the end of it all was that he became a monk. He hung up his ax Skullshaver in the chapel of his monastery, and the folk called it God's Ax because it had been the bane of so many heathen.

Close by, on Oxenlava, Elin dwelt in a convent Thord built for her, and here she died, and it is said that feeble-minded folk who were brought to her tomb had their wits restored to them. Whether this is so or not, it is certain that she was a very wise woman.

This is all of the tale of Thord's Wooing.

# *Beginning a Novel of Dan McGuire in the South Seas*

## CHAPTER I

KIALO is a large island, the largest of a numerous archipelago; it has rich soil, many level valleys and uplands; its best harbor is sheltered, deep, and ships may anchor within voice call of shore. It is such an island as drew planters into the venture of cane, coconuts, cotton and coffee long before the British Admiralty had crossed out the warning to sailing masters:

"Be on guard near any of this group. The natives are treacherous."

When Susan Fanning left her husband, who was a retired army officer older than herself, and came from San Francisco to Kialo with a spruce young planter, the island was prosperous and highly developed. At that time, like Samoa and Hawaii, Kialo was under native rule, which meant that it was controlled by the planter group through missionaries, or in this case through the one missionary of the place. This man of God acted as magistrate and held the fat old native king under his thumb.

Mrs. Fanning was a vigorous, headstrong, impressionable woman when she came to the island. A year or two later she had suffered much secretly and was less sure that she had done a wise thing in trying so rashly to be happy. Her first letters to her sister, who had sympathized with the elopement, gave a rather accurate if sketchy description of Kialo and certain persons of importance:

*—looking from the deck that first morning, the beach appeared to be littered with huge flat tins, as if Gargantuan residents had dined off sardines and flung the cans toward the water. These were corrugated iron sheds, set up in disorderly rows, and are filled to overflowing with sugar, copra, coffee and rum. Charley proudly assures me that some of our very best Italian olive oil comes from Kialoian copra.*

*Not far from the litter of sardine tins is a wooden church, built of imported lumber, and exactly like the ugliest churches at home. Here the natives must hive on Sunday or pay fines for absence.*

*King Tuaku is now a ponderous fat old man with a bloated, bestial, sad face. He appeals over and over to the planters to deliver him out of the hands of the missionaries, but nothing comes of it. The old king, I am told, often gets drunk and the old savage spirit stirs him to go out and kill*

"Wastrel," copyright, 1927, by Gordon Young.

# Wastrel

## By GORDON YOUNG

*white men, but he is so heavy on his feet that when in the least intoxicated any attempt to walk brings about his own downfall, and being down, he soon goes to sleep. Thus end the frequent uprisings of poor old King Tuaku.*

*The European part of the town is shabby and pitifully small for what every one thinks is so important a seaport. On the hilly slopes back of the town, hidden from view, are some very attractive homes.*

*Charley's partner, Mr. Brade, is the queerest old man. He is big and bowed, with a long beard, and hardly ever says a word; but he will look at you in the strangest way for the longest time, so you wonder uneasily whether he is very wise or just a little foolish. Mrs. Brade is a small wrinkled woman, very pious but quite worth while in spite of it. She can't read or write, but almost every day has a chapter of the Bible read to her and this by a man that people say is one of the worst rascals in the South Seas. His name is Dan McGuire. Charley doesn't like him at all, but he is interesting and not at all like other rascals. He is so gentle—"lazy," Charley calls him—with mild blue eyes and a shadowy smile that makes you just want to smile right back at him. He and young David Brade are friends. Young David will work on the plantation. I think he and Charley do not get on well together. David is just a boy and Charley, you know, is an experienced planter and owns as much of this plantation as the Brades. David has a schooner and goes about as a trader and a recruiter.*

*Very few planters can get all the blacks they need, but David and McGuire together do keep our plantation rather well supplied. At first I thought it very odd that a religious woman like Mrs. Brade should have such affection for a man like McGuire; but the reason is that she does not believe he ever did anything, or could do anything, very bad. You know how inquisitive I am; and when I asked her about what people said of him, she became almost indignant and told me:*

*"I know stories they tell about him ain't true. In a way Dan belongs to us Brades. It was David saved his life one time and brought him home here, and I nursed him as well as I could 'cause he was sick. The wild natives on Gilo had tried to kill him. I didn't like having him here then 'cause I knew what people said. While he was sick there was a Britisher come to the island. They come*

*into Port Kingston ever' two months or so; but when the captain of this one heard Dan McGuire was on the island he come all the way out from town just to see Dan. He was the very captain hisself that had caught Dan and took him to Sydney to be tried. And he told me things that Dan wouldn't ever tell about hisself. So now it doesn't make a'y difference what anybody says. Captain Sangor hisself told me Dan McGuire had done the bravest thing he ever knowed a man to do. So I'm proud of him. And I'm proud a boy never had a brother that thinks as much of him as Dan thinks of my boy.*"

## II

THE incident which Captain Sangor told to Mrs. Brade happened at the time when McGuire, having long been a fugitive dodging about the islands, was, as he put it, lucky enough to be caught.

Captain Sangor, on the sloop *Challenge*, was engaged in verifying the position of doubtful reefs south of the Carolines when he happened to learn that McGuire was living at a certain village on the reef-bound obscure island of Plagi almost under the *Challenge's* bowsprit. Captain Sangor knew that the only sure method of catching him was to approach the island at night, encircle the village, and so cut McGuire off from an escape into the hills. McGuire had a way of dodging like a flea from under any hand that reached for him.

The *Challenge* approached the island as planned but just before dawn there came on a sudden blow, and when the village awakened the sloop was trying to claw off as wild a lot of lee reefs as an unlucky ship could find.

McGuire knew Plagi, its reefs and channels, and had acted as pilot in hiding away there more than one schooner that was weary of being chased. He saw that if left to herself the sloop was almost sure to be wrecked, but he, if caught, had reason to expect to be hanged. However, he stirred up the natives to launch a canoe through the stormy surf and take him out. He had to yell himself hoarse through wind and spray, with much wild gesturing, before making the sloop understand that he was mad enough to try to come on board.

At last a line attached to a buoy was tossed over. McGuire got hold of the line, made an end fast under his arms and, the canoe having approached as close as it dared to the tossing ship, he jumped. He was dragged on board, badly battered. Some ribs were splintered and a leg was broken, but enough breath was left in him to act as pilot in taking the sloop through a boiling channel where in sheltered water she dropped anchor behind reefs upon which she would have been wrecked.

Captain Sangor, though now with the utmost reluctance, had to hold McGuire as a prisoner. The most serious and one unpardonable charge against him was that of having been one, and a leader, among the party of ruffians who when both ships lay becalmed had rowed some two miles and boarded the missionary vessel, *The Good Shepherd*. These ruffians had killed one of the missionaries and plundered the ship's stores. The result was blazing indignation throughout the Colonies.

McGuire, being at last caught, was held for trial at Sydney. Witnesses were fetched from various remote places. None would identify him. The captain of *The Good Shepherd* said positively that this was not the man who had been repeatedly called McGuire by his companions.

Had justice been in a sullen mood other charges, many other charges, though none nearly so offensive to the feelings of decent men, might have been brought against McGuire, for he had been much in the companionship of lawless, often desperate men who for a time appeared then vanished from the South Seas. Though there was little on the surface of his idling lazy character to indicate why, it was known that the one who was the boldest and most dangerous of these had

trusted him almost affectionately. But Captain Sangor of Her Majesty's sloop *Challenge* said that now he fully understood why. So thorough an acquittal of the one infamous charge carried, under the highly honorable circumstances of his capture, a kind of pardon for lesser crimes, and McGuire was permitted to go where he pleased.

McGuire fell in with a friend named Watson who was trying in a small way to build up a plantation on the wild island of Gilo. Land was no longer cheap except in the wild places, and there a man was likely to pay with his head for what he got. Watson, knowing McGuire, knew that he would not take any interest in the work, but liked him and wanted his companionship. It was not that McGuire was merely indolent; he was that certainly, but in addition he simply would not believe that any one got anything worth while for all the labor, worry and anxious hope that went into the sort of success that the world values. At his best McGuire appeared to be a good-natured beach loafer who liked to lie in the sun and languidly tease native girls; at his worst he was a shiftless adventurer with an odd sort of impudence and an inexcitable manner that seemed, and may have been, a kind of courage.

Gilo was a small, remote, lonely island. Watson had arranged with a trader to call every three months, "to bring supplies if we stay alive, to tell a gunboat to come an' give the niggers indigestion if they eat us."

This trader had chanced to be young David Brade.

McGuire had not been on Gilo long before he said:

"Watson, you're a blasted fool. The old chief here's your friend, but he's a sick man. You can stay if you want, but the day he dies I take to deep water. Go out at night. Go in an open boat. Go on a plank or swim. Sharks may not eat me. These fellows will. And you, you may think you've got the sort of head that looks good dried and set on a rafter, but I'm a modest fellow."

Inside of a month the chief was dead. There was yowling and feasting. Watson gave pigs and trade goods to the mourners, and the chief's buck son said they, Watson and McGuire, were "numba un fellas," which was supposed to mean that they had nothing to worry about. But they both knew that sooner or later the natives would make a try for their heads. At about this time young Brade, a week or two late, came.

McGuire told him.

"You see, it was easy to be friends with the old chief. He had done his fighting—had a shed full of heads, well dried. This buck son now will have to put on a show to get and keep the good opinion of his people. That's all. He simply has to. Watson's as good as done for 'cause he's fat—they'll take him first."

"Why don't you come off with me, both of you?" young Brade asked. "You haven't got such a start here but that you can cut loose and go somewhere where there're neighbors."

"We'll make out, somehow," said Watson. "Dan doesn't believe it's as bad as he says. If he did he wouldn't say it. I know him."

McGuire was sitting on the outrigger of a canoe that had been drawn out of the water. Watson squatted on his haunches, like a native. Brade, a young giant, very young for a boy who made a success of hazardous trading, stood looking down with puzzled seriousness, wondering if these men joked or really felt that there was danger. McGuire lazily dabbed at the sand with his bare toes and watched the marks his toes made. He lifted a lingering glance toward the young trader and smiled queerly, then looked away and a moment later began to fill his pipe.

Brade was an earnest young fellow, good-natured, but never joked—hardly ever knew when any one else was joking. He didn't at all understand that fleeting shadowy smile, had never seen any but a woman—and he knew but little of women, cared nothing at all about them—smile so half shyly as that odd lanky red-head who was known as a rascal. Brade

thought of it from time to time days afterward and wondered that he did think of it at all. Then like a revelation it came to him that McGuire did believe they had hardly a chance for their lives on Gilo, but stay he would and say nothing more about it. Thus suddenly, with a sense of complete understanding, it seemed to Brade, who had never before in his life suspected that there could be courage in a lazy, quite listless manner, that this fellow had actually smiled at what he believed was death. The more Brade thought of it, the more with curiosity and some uneasiness he was anxious for his next trip to Gilo that he might learn how those fellows were making out.

McGuire's own story of what happened was this:

"Natives knew of course that we were on guard. They could have killed us 'most any time, but it was their way to wait. Weeks went by. We weren't fooled. Our best hope was not to give 'em a chance to get us when we weren't looking, yet pretend to trust 'em. Long as they see you're afraid you haven't a chance.

"They were patient devils, but devils, and brained Watson one morning in the rain as we were standing together down near the beach by a shed half full of copra. They meant to hit us both the same instant, but I happened to glance aside at Watson just as the tomahawk fell. That gave me such a start that I bumped back dead against the man that was dropping a hatchet on me. Somehow he missed my head but chopped down on my shoulder.

"I spun about and backward, shooting as I went, stumbled inside that copra shed. Don't think I hit a nigger, but from the noise you'd have thought a mess of wounded men were howling for vengeance. They were just pow-wowing at the top of their voices. I thought there'd be a rush, a mix-up, then—well, that would be all.

"I'm a rotten shot, but I had a pocket full of shells and I scared away the two or three heads that were poked in through the door. They danced about howling for a minute or two, then they were off in a body. Forgot me, or seemed to—only they knew they had me safe enough whenever they wanted to get me out. It was only that they'd remembered the loot and every devil's son broke for the house to scramble for it. That's why they'd brained Watson, struck at me—wanted the loot. And they made for it, up at the house.

"All day I could hear them—in the rain, at a distance. You don't build a copra shed near where you eat. Sometimes through the door I caught the shadow-like passing of forms. I didn't shoot. I was willing they should forget me—then. Later I got to where I wished they'd come on and have it over with. We had some cases of whisky and the worst of the lot, the hot-blooded young bucks that would have come down and dug me out, were the soonest drunk. But I was glad for the rain. Else they might have thought to burn me out, or have me ready roasted when the ashes cooled. There I lay, neck-deep in copra. Queer, but at times still when I'm awake and half dreaming the stench of it will float through my head.

"That night of course I didn't sleep, and how it rained. And a headache came on—the copra, you know. Rotten stuff. The stink of it settled in my stomach. My shoulder hurt. Thunder was knocking about and lightning peered in at the door. I wished it would hit me. To understand at all how I felt you've got to understand that I no more expected to get out of that copra shed alive than I expect to get off the earth without dying. And I was so —— sick from copra, and sicker from the thought that I might be thrown into the cooking pot before I was good and dead. I wanted to put a bullet in my head—have it over with. I would've, but somehow I wanted to kick a nigger or two along ahead of me as I went just to show old Watson when I met up with him in hell that I hadn't funked it—not quite.

"Next morning there was a black dawn, and it didn't get much lighter. Rain let

up a little, but clouds hung low. There I lay, just waiting—waiting, with water dripping and splashing and the surf climbing the reefs. The jar of it, that surf, is maddening when you're on edge. Every creak and scratch was to me a nigger's foot sneaking up. Then I did hear voices, far off.

" 'They're coming,' I said. But they didn't. They were gathering down along the beach. I could tell that, and wondered what was up. So I crawled out to have a look through the door. There was Brade's schooner out in the bay. Had stood off in the night and come in at dawn.

"The blacks were on the beach having a jabbering palaver, with their arms flying about. Brade was lowering away a boat.

" 'Brade can't be the fool,' I said, 'not to know there's something wrong. Neither Watson nor me running down the trail with hand up to greet him. And the natives hanging back on the beach instead of splashing out to give him a welcome.'

"That's what puzzled the blacks too. He had only a crew of six Kialoans on his schooner, and I could make out four of them getting into the boat!

"I felt I had to signal somehow. But my yelling couldn't reach him and I said to myself:

" 'If you get out where he sees you, he'll think sure that everything's all right, and come right on—mystified perhaps, but he'll come. He ought to sense what's wrong!'

"Then I saw smoke puff out from over the schooner's rail. The two men he had left on board were shooting! Had he gone crazy he couldn't have done anything more senseless. Bullets couldn't reach the beach—it was just a warning for the niggers to stay on the beach. It was such a mad thing to do the blacks must have thought there was some trick in it, that they'd better hang off and wait to see what was up. But I knew then that Brade did guess Watson and me were done for, but was coming anyhow. There were four men at the oars and Brade was up in the bow. That was queer, his being there. The minute the boat grounded the blacks would swarm all over it. What a chance to take when a man knew as well as Brade the chance that he was taking!

"The boat came on, I'd say, to within an easy hundred yards. And I could tell that Brade wasn't watching the beach. He was stooping over. Then I saw him straighten up. There was a kind of faint hissing, a prolonged mysterious *shu-ua* and swish, and I wondered what the —— as I saw, or thought I did, a curving thread of smoke between boat and beach. Then I knew. Brade had shot a rocket on to the beach. I saw the niggers start to scatter, then they milled together, running to where the rocket had fallen near them. Then up went a big puff of sand with niggers mixed in it, and I heard the quick jarring clap—the kind dynamite makes. Brade had put fuse and cap to the dynamite tied to the rocket.

"There were yells and scampering for the bush. In half a minute—less—there wasn't a black in sight except the devils that were staggering and crawling off.

"I struck out for the beach. The boat was hanging off. Hadn't meant to come any closer, but when they saw me I could hear Brade yell. The boat came for the beach, and as I ran, overhead I heard another swish and then somewhere back in the bush another crack! I needn't have hurried. The blacks wouldn't have come again near those mysterious thunderclaps that tore up the ground and men. But I did run, splashed through the water and tumbled into the boat—done up. I couldn't even speak when Brade yelled, 'Watson?' I nodded and he understood. So that ended Gilo.

"Brade had passed up some other islands and pushed over to Gilo three weeks sooner than he was due. He wanted to see what had happened to us, and had made up his mind to shell the beach himself if anything was wrong. He'd used bamboo—the poles were to rig a cooking shed when he had a load of blacks for plantation work—to make rocket guns. He'd cut up pieces of dynamite he carried

for trade—planters, you know, use it for blowing out stumps in clearing land—and made them fast to signal rockets.

Then he came in an open boat to shell the beach. Said he knew it would be from six months to a year before a gunboat got around and by that time the natives would have forgotten what it was all about.

"Serious fellow, that boy. If he laughs at a joke it is only to keep from being laughed at for not laughing. He doesn't yet believe he did anything crazy. Says he knew the explosions would scare the blacks off even if they'd swarmed toward him in canoes. Says it was just as safe as dynamiting fish. And the boy believes it."

AFTER Gilo, McGuire was for a time really dangerously sick. He blamed it all on the copra stink. Kialo's cross-eyed doctor said it was too much bad whisky.

Mrs. Brade, whose heart went out to any one sick and broken, whatever his virtues or lack of them, may have thought she had not liked having the notorious McGuire in a bed on her veranda, but she had been from the first almost charmed by him, by his good-nature, his uncomplaining, his gentle teasing. She had never in her life been teased before by any one, and rather liked it.

Her boy David she thought with really more reason than a mother needs to think well of her son, had but one fault—he would not stay on the plantation where he was needed. He was a good son and affectionate, but would not have known how to go about saying what he did not mean, even teasingly. His father, old William, she thought was the best man in the world; but he said little, often nothing. Yet he had the great virtue of listening without reply to whatever she said and of doing usually what she told him. So McGuire was an altogether new sort of person for her. He made her laugh and there had been but little laughter in her weary life.

When McGuire was, as he said of himself, strong enough to be as lazy as ever, he often went to sea with David, and David was astonished to find the many islands and villages where the natives knew McGuire and would at his asking come to work on the Brade plantation. But though good money could have been made out of it he would not recruit a black for any other plantation. On many of the plantations blacks, having been in the first place kidnapped, were treated as slaves, cheated of their pitiful pay and often whipped.

There was nothing like that on the Brade plantation. Old William Brade was old, very old, a bowed but still powerful man. McGuire had very soon noticed that there was a kind of furtive gentleness that was like a caress about Brade's powerful hands when they touched the earth; he seemed to get a sort of sensuous pleasure out of putting his hands deep into the warm loose rich earth, in lifting up handfuls and letting its velvety trickle pass through his fingers. His rough hard-headed overseers, who were not much given to imagination, said that cane cuttings old Brade stuck into furrows with his own hands never died.

He had been a sailor shipwrecked in the South Seas thirty years before, and had remained among the islands, becoming by patient work at last a successful planter. Not long before he and his neighbor Fanning had become partners. Mrs. Brade, though doubtful, had approved because old William could barely figure and was often cheated.

Fanning was a rather handsome fellow, but close-fisted, good at business. He was not well liked by people on Kialo, was disliked by the white employees on the plantation. He acted as superintendent but exasperated the men. Brade, if he gave an order, would merely say what he would like to have done and walk off, and whether it was done or not he would make no complaint. The result was that men were often slack. Fanning would give orders with a superior air and hound the men until the work was done. The men were likely to be sullen toward him,

often quarreled with him; they picked him to pieces among themselves, said he was a —— coward, underhanded, a penny-pincher, and they had spied to see if he did sneak off at times in the night to meet some black girl.

A stranger's first impression of Fanning was almost sure to be of an upstanding strong man, genial and very good looking; but for some reason that couldn't be touched with a finger one grew less and less to think well of him. It was almost as if he had certain secret unmanly weaknesses. He was not lacking in diligence; he was good at market bargaining; he could be pleasing and agreeable. No one seemed to know just what was wanting to make his character sterling; but it was said by the Kialo planters, much given to horse racing and other gambling, that Fanning was a rotten sport; he seldom risked a loss and took with bad grace any that came.

Fanning from the first had not liked McGuire, but soon became just a little afraid of him, afraid of what lay behind the wastrel's steady gaze and misty smile.

Once when Fanning had been angry over something or other McGuire, after listening with an interested air, spoke one word—the name of a native girl, little more than a child, whom Mrs. Brade had as a servant and greatly liked.

At that Fanning demanded, growing red—

"What do you mean?"

"No more than you think."

"What—what do I think?"

"That I may tell Mrs. Brade."

"It's a lie!"

"What of it," McGuire asked, "if she believes me?"

"I'll break your —— head!"

McGuire looked pleased, and Fanning hesitated. McGuire's reputation already on Kialo was not good. The worst men liked him, or at least those who, being rough wandering adventurers, taking the planters' pay for a time, got drunk and fought freely on pay days and at other times, and who were therefore regarded as the worst by planters and their women.

"You," said Fanning, "lay around half drunk with niggers, and you make trouble for me with the men! I'll tell Mrs. Brade that!"

"Again? You told her till she told you to stop."

"It's because you read the Bible!" said Fanning with disgust.

"Come and sit by. I'll let you listen too. The Bible says, 'Meddle not with dark girls. It's dangerous to a Christian's standing in the community.' "

"I'm no —— Christian!"

"No?"

"No! And you tell me this! How did you learn about that girl? She tell you?"

"No, you told me."

"I?" said Fanning. "Don't try to be smart! I want to know how you knew."

"I didn't know. But now I do. So let her alone."

After that Fanning for a time tried to be friendly with McGuire, but this was no easier than to bully him. Fanning then suggested to the planter who served as British consul and to the missionary who served as magistrate that McGuire be deported and forbidden the island. Both officials regarded the suggestion approvingly, but nothing came of it, though everybody knew he loafed much in the beach shanties at Port Kingston. Fanning declared that McGuire was nothing but a beachcombing hypocrite who had got on the blind side of Mrs. Brade by reading the Bible.

Not long after McGuire's coming, Fanning, anxious over his share in the estate of a remote relative, went to the States. He returned with a wife. At least no one knew that she was not his wife.

Susan Fanning was not young, not pretty, not tidy, and evidently was silly enough to love such a man as Fanning, yet McGuire soon liked her. At first the men about the plantation eyed her askance and talked doubtfully of her among themselves. They were not used to having good women show the least attention to them, and she was friendly and would ask all about where they had

been, what they had done. It was some time before she suspected that they lied brazenly to make their tales worthy of her wonderment, but, detecting the truth, she laughed.

One man told McGuire—

"She's one good woman as can talk to a fellow like you or me and not make him feel a fool—or think she is."

The most disreputable of the Brade overseers was a vicious, grayed old foul-tongued fellow named Grimes. Formerly he had been on another plantation but, having been thrashed by the superintendent, he had come to work for Brade's. Labor at the time was so scarce that almost any man was welcome on almost any plantation.

Grimes, with profanity and some obscenity, once discussed Fanning and Mrs. Fanning thus:

"It ought to be her as is the man, him the female. He's got the nat'ral meanness of a purty woman. She's no blasted lady but a thoroughbred. The time I got my leg smashed up, didn't she wash an' 'tend me till the doctor got through his poker game there in town and come? Me, I was layin' there almost ready to bust from not cussin'. An' didn't she say, 'Oh don't be a fool. I know how you feel. Go ahead and swear!' So I did. An' I got so inter-rested in tryin' to make 'er stop her ears I forgot my leg. She's no lady, but a human bein'. Women like that Symonds girl are ladies, —— 'em! Just good to look at an' won't look at you."

Mrs. Fanning, in one of her early letters had written of Symonds and the daughter:

> *—a beautiful child, but just a child, and, poor thing, they say she isn't quite right in her mind. She looks so sad, only sad isn't the word, for she looks like a little princess who hates the world and everybody in it, but is too proud to show her feelings by more than coldly staring eyes.*
>
> *Her father, Mr. Symonds, is our one aristocrat. Quite the gentleman in appearance and manner; wears polished riding boots and glossy breeches, never turns his hand to a bit of work—never has on Kialo. Everything on the Symonds plantation is in the hands of a man named Zurdas, a big coarse brutal fellow, frightfully brutal every one says. And he has a son who isn't at all like him, but is sickly and seems half-witted, and is a dandy, and looks like a negro. I think it is this Manuel who isn't quite right in his mind and that little Reena Symonds is just heartsick and desperate because she is going to marry him. That's just what I can't understand when Mr. Symonds does seem really a gentleman; but something must be wrong with his mind too, for he treats that Zurdas boy almost like his own son! I guess everybody goes a little crazy after a few years on these islands. It was all so brilliantly tropical and interesting at first, but now I'm beginning to notice mildew and cockroaches.*
>
> *Symonds and Zurdas came here together years ago, each with a child and neither with a wife. They came from Cuba. I think Zurdas looks as if he had Indian blood. They had money then and are now very rich. Mr. Symonds is an American, but Reena's mother they say was a Spanish lady and the child looks very much the patrician. They treat her almost like a prisoner because they think her mind is, you know, a little shadowed with insanity. But I don't! Her eyes look too intelligent, as if she knew perfectly just why she feels as she does. They have tutors for her, but none stay long. I hear it said that Reena, even when a little child, would just sit and stare at them and not answer. Men who have worked for Symonds say she treats her father much the same way. Perhaps that is why Mr. Symonds seems a little sad, even if he is gracious to everybody, all the time.*

## III

ONE morning Mrs. Fanning sat in the shade of the stable door and watched a boy who had recently turned up on the island and who seemed to have an expert way with horses, exercise the young mare that Fanning meant to run at the spring races. McGuire, recently back from one of the schooner's trips, sauntered near with hands in pockets and a pipe, with bowl inverted, in his mouth. He knew nothing of horses, but appeared interested. His own experience caused him to wonder critically how that monkey-like little —— of a jockey stayed on.

Mrs. Fanning, reaching absently for her floppy hair that was always escaping its pins, asked, just as if McGuire knew something of racing, if he thought the mare would beat Symonds', or rather Reena Symonds' horse. This led to talk that presently brought the question of what did he think of Reena, and why did she seem so queer?

The reply was just about what she might have expected:

"How would you feel if there were men like me and David Brade on the island, and you had to marry Manuel?"

"Then why doesn't David do something? Or you?"

"Put a bearded man in skirts—David'll think him a woman. That's all he knows or cares about 'em."

"But you, then?"

"I, what?"

"You ought to do something. Really, isn't it shameful?"

"Manuel, you mean? It won't be so bad. He won't live long if he don't behave himself. And if he does, why then he'll be as good as the best of husbands."

"What does he do now, Dan?"

"Drinks too much."

Mrs. Fanning, smiling, inquired significantly—

"And how much do you call too much, Dan?"

"Whatever goes to your head instead of your feet. Nobody that I know of has ever seen old Zurdas floored, though he's always after a fight when he's been drinking. And there's old Grimes. I don't think he was ever under a table."

"Dan, I would really like to know how you feel when you look ahead. About the future, I mean? Are you going on all your life knocking about the islands, as you call it? Do you want to be like old Grimes when you are his age?"

"He's happy," McGuire said indifferently.

"When he's drinking, yes. But he has no home, no friends, no one respects him. He told me once that when he was your age he was just like you, and that made me wonder if you ever thought of what you might be like at his age?"

"No friends? Old Grimes knows more rascals than a judge. They all like him."

"You don't, do you, want to be like him? Not in your old age?"

"No. Give me a choice, I won't pick him to look like. Yet more than most, he laughs and sings—"

"When he's disgustingly drunk!"

"But he's happy. That's the thing, however you get it, isn't it?"

"Sometimes," said Mrs. Fanning with slight change of voice to a tone of reflective seriousness, "you pay too big a price."

"No, no! Never too big if you get what you pay for. That's all there is in life to gamble for. You play big stakes. You have to. You risk everything, body and soul together. Most try for money, some for women, a few try for Heaven. All after the same thing—to be happy. I'd say Grimes had won more than most men. He's about the happiest on Kialo. Utterly worthless old ——. If the preachers are right he'll land in hell. But maybe death starts a new game, as birth this one. Who knows?"

Mrs. Fanning gazed at the ground and nervously turned the plain gold band ring round and round on her finger. She had really tried to touch some serious part of McGuire's nature, but this response was unexpected. Yet such was his deceptiveness that she would ordinarily have been uncertain as to whether

he was merely pretending or was indeed making a defense for wastrels. As it was, what he said caused her to feel heavy-hearted and doubtful. More than a year had passed since she had gambled recklessly for a bit of happiness in coming to Kialo and, even as old Grimes, had risked her soul, but unlike him had won nothing that gave her an impulse now to laugh and sing.

## CHAPTER II

McGUIRE, on the small fat old pony which he always rode bareback because the fat sides of the pony were more comfortable than leather, stopped one morning before the storeroom.

Fanning was getting out chain harness to send to a teamster. He and McGuire had accepted between them a kind of tolerance that made contact more amiable, even if neither had increased liking for the other. Fanning came out of the doorway, his arms festooned with chain and the links clinking.

"You walk in chains as though used to 'em."

"These," said Fanning, "are the kind honest men carry—lighter than what you've worn. Where you goin' to do your loafin' today? Town?"

"The pony's too fat. I'm exercising 'im. Anything you want brought out?"

"If you see that cross-eyed doctor tell him to make another guess or two about the amount we're going to pay for sewing up them two Dutchmen that knifed themselves. My ——, you could buy Dutchmen for the price of his repairs. I've told Brade not to pay it. You can tell the doc we won't."

Fanning spoke hotly. He had a parsimonious interest in clipping expenses.

"No, he's got too sour a temper. Might say something to hurt my feelings."

"Yes, I've noticed. Maybe Mrs. Fanning would like something from town. Ride by and ask."

"And tell 'er you said to give me another bottle of Scotch?"

"If you want," said Fanning, satisfied, grinning. "I charged that last one on the books against you. I got it at a bargain. You pay the Kialo price."

McGuire was meditating a suitable reply when a strange horseman galloped round the turn and toward the storeroom.

"One of Symonds' men," said McGuire.

Fanning spilled the chain harness on the ground at his feet and stepped forward.

The man, an awkward horseman, drew up, tugging at the reins, swearing at the horse. With breath half jolted out him he greeted them—

"Good day, gentlemen."

"Howdy," said Fanning.

"At our place we're lookin' for a woman. Went crazy las' night an' made for the bush. Men 've gone ever'where to ask if she's been seen."

"We haven't seen her," said Fanning, speaking shortly. He had no friendly feeling toward Symonds, or rather toward Zurdas.

"What woman? What happened?" said McGuire quickly. And to check the man, who was about to turn and go, he added, "You'd better take another half hitch in that cinch. Saddle seems a bit loose."

The man, though he could see nothing, bent to one side and looked down along his leg. He rocked the saddle and it did seem a little loose.

"Thanks," he said, and swung off.

McGuire slid from the pony and came near, inquiring in friendly fashion as if eager to help:

"What happened over there? What woman? Not Miss Symonds?"

The man had thrown the stirrup across the saddle and was working with the cinch. He spoke with irritation:

"No, that old Preston woman. Long-nosed old maid. Crazy fool."

"Miss Symonds' companion?"

"Companion, ——!" said the man. "Who can be a companion to her?"

"Young Zurdas eh? Will be soon?" said Fanning with a little malice.

He knew the men detested the effeminate

negroid son of their master—for though Symonds might own, Zurdas ruled the plantation.

The Symonds man swore, cursing Manuel.

"We wonder much as you fellows how they'll ever whip Miss Reena into—"

"Whip?" asked McGuire.

"Oh you know what I mean. No man would lay a whip on her. But we wonder what they use. It's like a whip to make 'er willin'."

"But is she willing?" McGuire inquired.

"Then why don't *she* bolt? We'd look for her—to help hide 'er better! But this fool Preston woman! It was about nine o'clock las' night. Servants heard 'er yell, they say. Zurdas was there at the house, him an' Symonds. They heard 'er. Then she was gone. Routed us out. We went about all night with lanterns an' callin'. Didn't think she could've got this far, but a crazy woman! ——, who knows? They told me to ride over. You haven't seen 'er. Thanks."

With much clawing at horn and mane he got into the saddle, jerked down his hat, reined about, threw up his hand in a gesture of friendly departure and rode off, thumping with spurless heels at the horse's ribs.

"This climate's sure hard on women," said McGuire, meditatively.

"Climate, ——!" Fanning answered, bending to the chains, straightening them out. "It's that Symonds place. Drive anybody crazy! Old Zurdas whips niggers because he likes to hear 'em yell. Got on her nerves. I tell you, Dan, that Zurdas is a bad one. Put to it, he'd make no more of murder than gutting a fish."

McGuire said nothing and did not look up. He knew Zurdas and stories of him. Zurdas was a bad one, a powerful brutal man, contemptuously amiable at times but readily quarrelsome. Some months before, when drunkenly looking for a fight, he had with hardly more than one blow caused Fanning's good looks to depart and stay away for weeks.

## II

IT WAS some eight or ten miles from the Brade plantation to Port Kingston. The road had been gouged out through jungle and hillsides, and nearly the whole of its winding length lay in black hot shadows. Much hauling cut deep ruts and during the dry season scattered dust. About four miles from town the road from the near-by Symonds plantation came up a steep hillside and there joined the highway of Brade and his neighbors.

McGuire rode slowly always. Haste and bustle were disagreeable. Besides, being a poor horseman, he was easily jolted off.

He had gone not more than three or four miles when he met three horsemen—Old Zurdas, young Zurdas, and a fellow called Tomas, an old and wrinkled man who was supposed to be a Spaniard or an Indian. Tomas was a fine horseman and usually won, whatever the handicap, races at the Port Kingston track. The Kialoan planters were as enthusiastic over horse racing as the Australians. Even Miss Symonds was much in the saddle, but never alone—usually accompanied by old Tomas, her escort, if not warder.

The elder Zurdas pulled his horse broadside on the road as if McGuire, on an old fat pony, might try to dash by. He then flipped up the brim of his hat the better to see, or else the better to show his bony massive Indian-like features and the look he had that made people respectful.

"McGuire, have you seen that —— Preston woman?"

"No. One of your men was over. We told him no."

Zurdas scowled, studying McGuire's face suspiciously.

"You sure?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"It'd be like you—" Zurdas stared with frowning doubtfulness—"be like you to lie!"

McGuire, wondering at this excited

suspicion, looked at him thoughtfully and glanced aside at the sickly coarseness of young Manuel's face. The boy had thick lips, spreading cheek bones, eyes that seemed to bulge, showing much white. His skin was very dark, his voice thin, not like a man's. Then McGuire looked at the immobile wrinkled face of Tomas.

"What the devil," he inquired, with lowered lids shadowing his steady glance at Zurdas, "would we want with her?"

Zurdas hesitated, and though but an instant, McGuire noted that he was for that one instant at loss to explain. Then with bullying rush of words, as if vehemence would make them more convincing, said:

"To keep us searching. Put us out. Make trouble. Here we've had to stop work to look for that crazy fool. She went off her head last night. No telling what she would tell about—" He checked himself, but, swearing, exasperated, added: "She's crazy you know!"

"Yes. Would be to bolt for the bush —after dark, the man said. No, we've got enough crazy people of our own. Maybe she made for town?"

"Been there. Been everywhere. Some places two an' three times!" Zurdas cursed her, then added: "I'll find her, by —— I will!"

Manuel spoke up in a thin high voice—

"Some of the blacks have hid her body away."

Zurdas from under shaggy brows looked toward his son as if a little hopeful of being persuaded that this was true, but shook his head. Facing McGuire, he stared for a moment, then struck his horse, and coming almost shoulder to shoulder with McGuire, looked down and said with growling baffled anger—

"If I ever find you people got her, by ——, I'll kill you!"

"I'm willing. You just do that when I'm fool enough to hide a crazy woman to spite somebody."

"Don't think I don't mean it!" said Zurdas, bending forward slightly, putting his face near McGuire's, and putting into his look the hard-eyed menace that had done much to give him the reputation of a man who would stop at nothing when angered. "You've got a name for fooling people, McGuire. But don't you fool with me. That's an honest, friendly warning. Understand?"

Then he straightened up and pulled the horse aside, but still watched McGuire, who nodded, saying:

"But mostly they fool themselves—like you, almost, now. I tell the truth an' am thought a liar."

"And almost now I believe you *are* lying," said Zurdas, with less anger but in a way that made his voice rumble in his throat. He glanced to right and left into the jungle clinging to a steep hillside, untouched by planters' ax, as if perhaps here he might catch sight of her, then futilely said—

"Where can that fool woman have got to?"

"Manuel made a good guess. If blacks got her, her body's out there—" McGuire swung a hand vaguely toward the bush—"somewhere."

Zurdas, with jaws clenched, said, "I'd like to believe it!" and striking his horse, rode on. Manuel and Tomas followed at a gallop.

McGUIRE'S pony plodded on, with ears laid back, as if he too were frowningly thoughtful.

It wasn't so much that the woman, a thin, depressed, melancholic woman, had bolted into the bush, or why she had done it that mystified. That was a crazy thing to do, and to call her crazy explained it. Nor was it so much the anxious searching for her. The Symonds people would do that, would have to search till she was found, and all Kialo would join if she were not found soon. A white woman lost in the bush—as the search went on excitement would grow.

"Why would he think we at Brade's might hide her?"

McGuire eyed the question broodingly. He nodded to himself as if half understanding why, but he did not, and nodded at the thought.

"One of these days Zurdas is going to half kill me—or try it. When word gets back to him of what I've told natives on islands here and there—then? A recruiter is supposed to lie about rival plantations. Only I haven't lied. It is Zurdas that's crazy. One look at his son, you know it. He loves the half-wit."

Many stories were told about Zurdas. One that interested McGuire was of the time Zurdas had struck with the butt of his whip one of the overseers and, thinking the man dead, had carried the body into the stable and thrown it at the heels of a horse. But the horse had not stepped on it. The man recovered consciousness and, putting two and two together, realized what had happened. He went at once to town and told his story.

Zurdas, hearing of this, said the man had been drunk and lied:

"Hit 'im? Yes I hit 'im, an' told him to get to —— off the plantation."

"Maybe the Preston woman," McGuire thought, "caught sight of some such trick —had the wits scared out of her. Zurdas is afraid she'll tell. But he's a good liar. Why should he care? Yet he does. He'd rather find her dead than alive, too. That's plain. At least it's plain he acts like it."

Thus troubling himself with what he could not understand, McGuire rode on, and presently became aware of a crippled native hobbling along the road. The fellow was not far ahead. McGuire shouted. The native did not look back, but seemed trying to hurry the more. McGuire then called his name:

"Hi, Pealo!"

Pealo turned his head, stared across his shoulder, then twisted about and, waiting for McGuire, sat down at the side of the road.

McGuire was joking but as a part of the joke looked serious, saying:

"Didn't want to stop? Wouldn't look around? 'Fraid you were going to catch ——, eh? What you been up to?"

Pealo, in silence, tried to seem not to understand.

Then McGuire offered tobacco. Pealo took it with paw out greedily and fished in his dilly-bag for the pipe. But he said nothing, did not even grin, pleased. McGuire had no special liking for the old ——, but was sorry for him, half admired him as one of the few natives who would not by gewgaws nor gin be tricked into giving up his land to whites. That was why he was crippled. Zurdas, years before, exasperated by his stubbornness, had tried to pound some sense into him. McGuire noticed that Pealo, as he crumbled the tobacco, was regarding him furtively.

"Well, you going to tell me why you wouldn't stop when I yelled?"

"I thought you the other men."

"What other men?"

Pealo grinned. The grin was like a sneer.

"They look for her! Huh!"

"Look for— Ho, see here! What you trying to tell me?"

McGuire, careful not to startle the native into lying, gazed with mild steadiness. Then, as Pealo stared but said nothing, he asked encouragingly:

"You know where she is? That white woman Zurdas wants?"

Pealo hesitated, but nodded.

"Where is she, Pealo?"

The native jerked his head, vaguely.

"Sick is she? Or all right?"

"She all right. They come once, they come two times. 'She here, you —— nigger?' I say, 'No. Who here? Nobody here.' "

"Who asked you? Zurdas?"

Pealo nodded jerkily.

"He'll break your —— neck, sure."

Pealo grinned evilly, unalarmed, and shook his head. He seemed reluctant to explain, then, suddenly:

"She say, 'You go town, Pealo. Bring men. I talk. Then men they kill Surda!' " Pealo clicked his tongue, pleased.

"What's she going to tell?"

The native shook his head indifferently, but a moment later the anger of an old grudge blazed in his face, and in native speech he broke out:

"It was Surda who did this thing to

me!" He leaped up grotesquely, clapped his hand down along the crippled leg, shouted, "He call me pig! He call me —— nigger! He hit me. I fall. He kick and jump on me! I bring men now to hear the woman talk. Then they kill Surda! Ey-ha!"

Pealo's voice had been loud. McGuire turned his head, listening. He could hear no one coming. He said:

"I know, I know all about it, Pealo. But now you listen to me. No matter what the woman tells, nobody will kill Zurdas for it. Maybe he did knock her about—or worse. He's brute enough to do it. From the trouble he's taking to find her, I rather think she has got some such story to tell. But whatever she says, the worst he's got to fear is that some of the more decent whites won't speak to him for a while. But as sure as big fish eat little ones, Pealo, he'll kill you if he finds out you've hid her!"

Pealo looked sullen, trying not to believe.

"I'll tell you," said McGuire. "Take me to 'er. She wants you to bring somebody. I'll hear her story, and if I think it enough, I'll tell it there in town."

Pealo had hoped to return from town leading many white men who would grow angry when they heard what the white woman said, but, persuaded though dissatisfied, he agreed. McGuire got off the pony and let Pealo ride. They went back along the road until they came to the trail leading up to Pealo's hut. His daughter and her husband had before daylight gone to the market in town and would make a day of it, not returning until after dark.

On the way Pealo, with ever a warped, shortened leg to keep him from forgetting, talked volubly of his grievance.

Though Kialo was under native rule, European countries, lying politely to one another in denying greedy desires, had appointed certain residents to consular dignity. Whatever the charges of injustice that may be gathered against the British, a dominant influence of British authority in the South Seas was, and is, justice. Toward that end Great Britain, almost from the first coming of her ships into the South Seas, denied the power of life and death, at least over white men, to any island not under a civilized government, and also in theory, often actually, opposed on all islands the seizure of land without at least the semblance of lease or purchase. Thus Pealo, through some ancient tribal right, held his jungle though it touched the far-flung Symonds estate and Zurdas wanted the land.

## III

THEY came into the clearing. Chickens sprawled in the dust at the shaded side of the shaggy hut. A boar, his hind leg tethered to a tree, grunted a sleepy welcome. Near-by was a great pile of coconut husks. Pealo, though a cripple, could husk and split coconuts as well as any one.

"Where is she?"

Pealo gestured vaguely with no eagerness. He trusted McGuire but had wanted much noise and many people.

"Let's hide this horse. Somebody may come up again while I am here."

Pealo did not dismount. He said, "We go this way," then made sounds and flourishes that outraged the wise sad pony; but being patient, the pony made no more of a protest than to lay back his ears as if frowning angrily.

They went through a winding trail, dark and still, and at last came to a small stream that drew its life from the oozing springs trickling out of a rocky bluff covered with ferns. In the stillness was the sound of dripping water, the smell of moist ground and decay. There was no sunlight, only jungle shadows.

The woman waited there. She had heard them and, half hidden, looked out anxiously. A little reassured by recognizing the native, she rose.

Her clothes were torn, her long skirt bedraggled and in rags, her face scratched, her hands cut from blundering about in the scrub. Her straight hair fell about her face and shoulders in knotted tangles.

She did look crazy. Near her, still tied in leaves, was food that Pealo had brought. She had not been able to eat, could scarcely stand now, and was half dead with exhaustion and fear.

McGuire had seen her occasionally at Port Kingston, and had thought then that she looked about as sour and colorless—unhappy too—as any woman could.

"You," she said weakly with a trace of disappointment, "are Mr. McGuire?"

"What on earth has Zurdas done to drive you to a thing like this?"

McGuire had no doubt at all but that she was out of her mind. He felt pity but was a little uneasy, believing her just as mad as Zurdas had said. She was a lank-limbed English woman, thin of breast, long of nose, now pale and chilled until she trembled. Over teacups in a curate's garden she would have been at ease, at home, but this was the black jungle, hushed and gloomy. She was afraid of Zurdas and the jungle. She had spent a frightful night in its darkness. Her thoughts now skittered like a mad woman's.

"I'm afraid, oh terribly! I can't endure this! I want to go home—home!" Her home was in England. "He would have killed me! He will kill me! He is a murderer!"

She wept without sobbing. Tears ran out of her eyes. Much weeping seemed to have washed away the light blue coloring so that her eyes seemed without coloring, but were bright with the look of madness. She had torn a rag from her tattered waist and used that for a handkerchief. It was as wet with tears as if it had been dipped in a pool, and she nervously squeezed it into a wad and shook it open, wiping the tears away.

"Oh God, what shall I do?" She glanced upward, imploringly. It was a prayer, but above her, close above her, was only thick dark foliage. "He will kill me!"

Pealo had hobbled near and stood crook-legged, attentive, trying to understand. He peered anxiously at McGuire. He wanted to see wrath gathering on McGuire's face, the wrath that would bring about the punishment of Zurdas. The fat pony nibbled fastidiously on green young leaves.

The woman sat down. It was as if she collapsed from exhaustion, and her body twitched as when one has a chill. She wanted to talk and did talk, but her thoughts were confused, and though she seemed trying to tell a connected story the words were at times jumbled and disconnected.

McGuire understood that she had been attracted by a notice in the paper, a London paper, of a companion wanted for a planter's daughter on Kialo. Miss Preston was the eldest of three sisters, the only one unmarried. Her father had been a schoolmaster, but had recently died. She had applied for the situation with excellent references, and had been accepted. She had been happy at the thought of travel and residence in the tropics, but—

"—the day I came into the house, I felt that something dreadful was hiding there. I could *feel* it, but I tried not to feel it. I tried to think it was the tropic strangeness and that it would pass. It did not pass. Mr. Symonds was kind and I was so thankful that he was. I was distressed, oh wretchedly! that Miss Reena would hardly speak to me. I know now that she thinks I was one of her jailers too. I told Mr. Symonds almost when I first came that I thought I had better leave because Miss Reena would not accept me as a friend—and oh, if only I had gone! He said to me, very quietly:

" 'Yes, Miss Preston. Yes. I understand your feeling perfectly. But you are merely a stranger. I am her father, and she will not accept me as a friend. Please do not think of leaving.' And I remained, but oh, if I had only gone!

"I tried so hard to win her confidence. At times she seemed almost on the verge of trusting me, then there would come that cold look in her eyes and I could feel her draw back. Poor child! I thought it was just what they all said—that she

was not quite right in her mind. But I know now that she knows, knows who those men are, knows that she is just as much a captive as if she had been stolen by Gipsies or made a slave! And that horrible Manuel. She did say to me one day, quickly, as we saw him ride by—'I would rather be a native girl than his wife!' Then she would say nothing more.

"I—I—I don't know what made me do it, for I wouldn't think of doing a thing like that except it was just so lonely and I felt, I just felt there was something! But at night when Zurdas would come to the house I would try to slip to where I could overhear him and Mr. Symonds talk. Once quite by chance I overheard something that made me sure if I listened I might learn—oh it was shameful to eavesdrop, but I just couldn't help it. I just felt I had to know!

"Last night Mr. Symonds and Zurdas were on the far side of the veranda, away from where every one slept. I slipped into the room nearest them and crouched down in the dark by an open window. Their voices were low, but I could hear Mr. Symonds even sigh. Mr. Symonds may own the plantation but that terrible man owns him! They had been talking before I got to the window. Mr. Symonds doesn't want Miss Reena to marry that Manuel. Oh, as if my brain were wax their words are written there and I shall never forget them. Mr. Zurdas was not angry—that is what made it so horrible! Oh, really, he laughed as he talked, as if murder—murder were just nothing!

"He said:

" 'You did me a good turn once Symonds. You're the only man that ever did, and I've been paying you back ever since. The score's more than even. Who's the big gentleman on Kialo? Symonds, *Mister* Symonds. Who made him rich? Who does his work? Who makes 'em hit the collar, niggers and whites, on this plantation? Zurdas, that —— Zurdas! And you know we've had it understood from the start that my boy was to marry that girl. He's my son, but she's no blood of yours.'

"Mr. Symonds said—

" 'And I feel she knows it, too. From childhood she has treated me as if she knew.'

"Zurdas swore and said:

" 'How could she know? She wasn't more than three. Who's there been to tell her? Not you. I didn't. Tomas doesn't know. Her mother died at sea. How's she to know you're not her father?'

"Mr. Symonds said:

" 'I feel she senses it, somehow. We killed her father and I know the child feels it.'

" 'Who killed him? We? Not you, Symonds. I did it. The woman loved you. The man was in the way. Besides, you know, there was fighting all over that —— country. You did your part in carrying off your friend the general's pay-roll. Then we started for Australia. We're in this together, have made a good thing, and we'll go through with it as planned. So no more talk against that marriage. I like you, but in this you've got to do as I say. And you know it. It's right you should, so no more talk. As for the girl, she's like her mother—the prettiest woman in Honduras, her mother. Made you think she was too proud to be loved by anybody; then, you know, Symonds! suddenly flung herself to you. Did she think less or more of you for thinking you killed that gringo husband of hers? I gave you the credit. I told her it was a duel. Manuel's a fine boy. Reena will face about suddenly just as her mother did with you.'

"Then I got up," said Miss Preston. "I was horrified and half sick, and my knees were stiff from the strain of crouching there. It was dark and I struck against a chair. Then I waited motionless, holding my breath. Such a slight noise, I thought they wouldn't notice. They had stopped talking, and I thought they were just listening, so I kept quiet. But that terrible Zurdas had slipped to the door, and almost before I knew he

was near, he struck a match. Oh how he cursed me!

" 'You, you've heard it all, have you! You, I'll choke you here and now!'

"I screamed and ran. I don't know what I did or how I got by him, but I got to the veranda and jumped. I didn't try to run. It was dark. I crawled under a bush.

"I heard him say, 'Now I've got to kill that woman!'

"He called me frightful names. I heard Mr. Symonds say—

" 'If she should tell Reena!' Zurdas cursed and said,

" 'She will never tell anybody. I'll see to that. Anyhow, we'll say she's gone crazy. Climate, you know.'

"They called servants and men, and went about in every direction with lanterns and I could hear their voices. I crept from one bush to another, so that sometimes they would look where I had been just after I left it. Oh, I was so frightened! He will kill me, I know he will! When I got a little way from the house I ran through the darkness blindly. I did not know where I was going but I just had to go on. I got to the cane field and went on between rows. At last I sat down and must have fainted. When I came to it was just beginning to be light. I left the cane field for fear the laborers would come upon me. In the bush I found a path and it brought me to this native's house. Zurdas and another man had already been up here to ask if anything had been seen of me. That is why this native was willing to help me hide. I told him what men would think of Zurdas when they heard my story. But I am lost—oh, lost utterly!—unless I can get to the British consul. I sent this native to bring the consul and other men. I can't, I just can't walk to the town and—and what shall I do? What shall I do!"

She had pulled herself together somewhat to tell her story clearly, but with the story told she again became hysterical. The experience had been frightful and it was frightful to be thus hid away in the gloomy jungle, without friends and in fear of her life.

McGuire said:

"I'm willing to try to get you into town on the pony there. But we'll probably meet Zurdas, or some of his men. They're riding up and down the road. You're right, he'll try to make people think you're crazy. Now you can try that, going in on the pony; or if you want, you wait here, and I'll go in after the consul and bring him out. Probably be late in the afternoon before I can get back.'

"I don't want to meet that terrible Zurdas! I'll do anything not to meet him! I'll wait, I'll wait here. But hurry. You'll hurry, won't you?"

"The best you can do is curl up there in the bracken and sleep."

"I can't. I can't. I couldn't sleep. I shall go mad! I am going mad! And poor, poor Reena Symonds!"

"She knows, you say?"

"Oh, I don't know. But it's as if she did. The way she looks at everybody. Oh, how perfectly horrible! They have tried to teach her to call that man father! Why does God let such evil men live, oh why?"

## IV

McGUIRE and his pony returned to the road and made their way along toward Port Kingston. As he neared the town he heard horses coming behind him. He pulled to one side and jogged along looking over his shoulder. Mr. Symonds and Reena came into view.

"Taking her to town so if they do find the woman Reena won't have a chance to hear or overhear her story," said McGuire to himself.

He had observed Reena many times, in fact every chance he had. All men were inclined to stare at her, and because of her beauty they called her proud. Had she been homely and as aloof she would probably have been called merely shy, though there was nothing shy in the steady look of her dark eyes which at times seemed to challenge rather than evade the questioning stares of men. Her mother, it was

said, had been a beautiful Spaniard, "Reena" was perhaps originally Reina, and there was a tawny richness in her complexion—of a kind that did not come to a young woman through sunburn.

As they drew near McGuire stopped his pony and looked toward them. He noticed or imagined that Mr. Symonds appeared worried, harassed. He had reason, surely, to be perturbed. He, the gentleman planter of Kialo—and a woman was loose who could tell a tale, however much it might be discredited, that would make all men stare suspiciously and might start an inquiry that would eventually get at the facts. With the Preston woman's story told—and believed—he would be crushed.

McGuire raised his hat, saying—

"Good day, Mr. Symonds."

"Good day, McGuire."

Symonds had no thought of pausing, but McGuire said:

"Just a minute, Mr. Symonds. I met Zurdas, Manuel and old Tomas on the road back there. And Mr. Symonds, I want to ask you something. I'd like to know why they think I might hide away and help that crazy woman you people are looking for? Zurdas wouldn't believe me, though I told him no."

Reluctantly, Symonds had paused. His smile was thin, nervous. He plucked at his neat beard. Apologetically he said—

"Zurdas is rather impulsive at times, you know."

"Yes, but—" McGuire replied with good-natured reproach, glancing toward Reena, who, erect and straight-shouldered in the saddle, regarded him intently—"Mr. Symonds, if I take the trouble to lie, why, Zurdas ought to know I'd do it so well—" McGuire smiled mistily—"he'd believe me. Why else tell a lie? And I didn't to him. That's what made me wonder. What's wrong, anyhow?"

"We're just anxious, McGuire. Very anxious. A white woman, lost in the bush!" said Symonds quickly, urging his horse on.

As they trotted past him and on ahead, McGuire saw that Reena turned and looked at him steadily for some moments, though he too looked straight at her. It was, he felt, as if she were wondering about him, and what she had heard of him.

"—you'd like to have the woman tell her story in Port Kingston, wouldn't you? Wouldn't have to marry Manuel then, would you? And I wonder, do you guess the story she's got to tell?"

Thus McGuire spoke to himself.

## V

PORT KINGSTON in the heat of the day was usually much like some town over which an evil, or perhaps a good fairy had cast a spell of silence and drowsiness. Men fresh from the North might stir about and be a little contemptuous of the residents' laziness, but the tropic spell soon made them, too, eager for the midday snooze. From the beach shanties, far off from the town and not supposed to exist at all, since it was against the law of the drunken King Tuaku's chief magistrate to sell liquor, to the fine homes on the cool hillsides, almost everybody after the noonday meal dozed, snored, perspired, and awoke fatigued and snappish.

As he came into the town McGuire began to wish that he had not been unlucky enough to find the Preston woman; this because he had to tell her story, tell where she was, and Zurdas would learn what he had done.

"It's not that he'll know what I've done so much as, somehow, he'll twist it about so nobody'll believe her—then ever'body'll think it proper he should break my meddlesome neck." A little petulantly he reflected, "I always get into trouble with the plain truth. Ugly female, truth. Worse than a harlot for making you sorry you've loved her. Must be why so few men do."

The retired planter who served as British consul was a Mr. Morris, a mild, grandfatherly person, perfectly honest but neither alert nor firm. His friend the missionary-magistrate was a big sluggish

pompous man with a catarrhal cough which led to much clearing of the throat, like a trumpeting for silence, before he spoke. Zurdas could probably bully either of them into thinking the Preston woman was wholly insane; moreover, Symonds was their close friend and would be likely to persuade them to whatever he wanted them to think.

McGuire had the idle wish that Miss Preston were a French woman. Lamont, the French planter and consul, was a cynical, polite, unmarried man, who had been much about in the world. He was observant, hard to deceive, but very tolerant. He even showed a mild liking for McGuire, largely perhaps because McGuire was one person who caught the meaning of Lamont's nimble sarcasm, expressed in broken English.

The consul and the magistrate were the ones to whom McGuire knew he would have to go. He would take them and whomever else they chose to bring to the Preston woman. They could hear her story as he had heard it, and think what they liked; and whatever might come of it would come. It was not in McGuire's nature to worry. It was, however, his nature to like the pleasant indolence that trouble disturbed.

"It isn't that they've done murder off in some far country. Many men, none the worse thought of for it, have got blood-spots on their hands. But if Reena confirms what the woman tells then Kialo will get excited. At that, Zurdas isn't the sort to turn tail and run. But if it's true and the girl knows, why hasn't she told somebody? Maybe that Preston woman is crazy. She looked it."

He rode up to the club, a square building entirely surrounded by a wide screened veranda where planters loafed, drank, gambled, fingered old newspapers and magazines. He did not enter. He had never been in the club, but drank in beach shanties with beach-combers, sailors, the rough boisterous overseers, and, most reprehensible of all, loafed about quite openly with natives.

McGuire rode to the rear of the club house. A young native with a pan of potatoes in his lap, head thrown back and arms hanging low at his side, slept.

McGuire shouted at him.

The boy awakened with a start, overturning the potatoes that thumped and rolled as if they were partly of rubber.

"Is Mr. Morris here?" McGuire asked.

"No, he no here," said the boy sourly.

"Go look."

"You go ——!"

"That's no nice way for a young cannibal to talk. Go look."

"You go ——!" the boy repeated, loudly.

A Chinaman, the cook, attracted by the voices appeared.

"Wat matta he'e? Wat matta? You cussy white man, eh? Go ——, eh?"

The cook quite calmly poured out inflectional sing-song sounds, slapped the boy on one side of his head and to make the balance even slapped the other. This he did without haste, methodically, as if it were part of the day's work.

"You cussy white man, eh? Pully soon you tly cussy *me!*" Addressing McGuire, "Wat you want um do, eh?"

"Is Mr. Morris here?"

"Him no he'e, but go lookee you! Chop-chop!"

The boy went, and presently returned, saying that Mr. Morris was not there, and McGuire, having thanked the cook, rode off, while the cook with a kind of dispassionate vehemence continued in Chinese to give the native youngster what may possibly have been a discourse on good manners.

McGuire rode up the hillside to Mr. Morris' home. The old gentleman had been on Kialo for many years and was a contented and prosperous man. A married son managed the Morris plantation. Consular duties were trivial. There were many small grandchildren, and these took up most of his attention.

McGuire approached the house along a graveled drive and through grounds almost as dense with growth as a wilderness.

At the veranda steps he fastened the

reins in an iron ring that had been let into a block of coral, for though the pony would not wander off he might nibble orange blossoms.

No one was in sight. If the consul dozed it would not ordinarily be judicious to awaken him, but this matter was urgent. McGuire went to one corner of the house and looked down the veranda, seeing no one. He then went to the other corner and at the far end of the veranda saw two women. This was the coolest place, the most used, with table, chairs, mats and a swinging couch.

McGuire approached before he was noticed. One of the women was Mrs. Morris, the other Reena Symonds.

Mrs. Morris was a rather stout friendly woman, but generally regarded as a bore. The only person she really and intensely disliked was the island doctor, a cross-eyed sardonic man. He, having been called at a time she thought herself near death, said there was nothing the matter except that she ate too much.

She now blinked a little uncertainly, adjusted her spectacles, and said:

"Oh, Mr. McGuire, isn't it? How do you do, Mr. McGuire. Did you want to see the consul?"

She spoke of her husband as "the consul" as if the dignity of ancient Rome attended the title on Kialo.

"If he's asleep, I'll wait, Mrs. Morris, though—"

"Asleep, today! Oh early this morning, just as soon as he heard—you have heard about the poor woman, haven't you? I was just telling Reena it seemed such an odd thing to do! Why, even if a woman did go crazy, it seems to me she ought to have better sense than to bolt into the bush! And at night!"

Mrs. Morris paused for breath, and McGuire, glancing aside, saw that Reena was looking straight at him attentively—almost as if she listened for something unexpected that he would say.

He asked of her:

"Did it come suddenly, Miss Preston's attack? Does any one guess as to what brought it on?"

Reena, though this was the first time McGuire had ever spoken to her, seemed about to reply, but Mrs. Morris, taking a banana from the fruit basket and having recovered her breath, said:

"Why, that's just the way the tropics affect some people! Now men, they take to drink. I have seen the time when I thought even I would go mad! Haven't you ever felt that way, Reena?"

"No," said the girl firmly and gave Mrs. Morris a glance that seemed almost resentful.

"Of course you wouldn't, Reena!" Mrs. Morris, having half stripped the banana held it in one hand, with the other she waved a fan before her face, and munching away, explained, "You have had a beautiful home all your life. Tutors, books and horses, everything to make a girl happy. Now when we first came to the islands—"

She told at length something of how lonely and even dangerous it had been in the early days. McGuire stood hat in hand, listening patiently, with even a look of interest. When Mrs. Morris paused to gobble the last of her banana he said:

"But what would you think, Mrs. Morris, if I told you of a young woman on one of the islands down here who had had to live with the men that killed her father—"

Mrs. Morris interrupted:

"Oh yes, I've heard of savages adopting children. Very well treated, too, they say. There was—"

She mentioned the two or three stories of such things that she had heard in her many years in the South Seas.

"But these I mean were white savages," said McGuire, and looked directly at Reena.

The girl's face had a startled expression, her lips were parted slightly, breathlessly, and with searching stare she seemed trying to determine just what he meant. McGuire nodded, then looked away.

Mrs. Morris, having fingered the fruit basket and selecting another banana, was talking again as she peeled it. What

she said now, like almost everything she said, was unimportant. McGuire glanced repeatedly toward Reena, but she sat motionless with eyes downcast. One slim hand was pressed against her cheek and the other, in a tight fist, was against her lips.

McGuire, having learned that Mr. Morris and Mr. Cullum, the magistrate, very much distressed by Miss Preston's disappearance, had gone out to the Symonds plantation, was ready to leave but Mrs. Morris insistently continued to talk.

"—an English girl, too, you know, and he the consul—so much excitement out there, Mr. Symonds brought Reena to stay with me," said Mrs. Morris.

McGuire went away, got on the fat plodding pony and set out for the Symonds plantation; and he meditated doubtfully as to whether he had done a foolish thing in having tried to convey to Reena that he knew her secret. Then with a sensation that surprized, even startled him, he thought:

"But she'll be frightened by what she knows of me! Knows, at least has heard, that *I'm a —— beachcomber.*"

And for the moment McGuire seemed to stand aside and, with a passing flush of regret, look at himself, noting his resemblance, especially as far as reputation went, to old Grimes whom no man would trust, much less any woman. Far less a woman such as Reena.

## VI

HE HAD never visited Symonds' plantation; but he had no uneasiness about this visit except that it might not be easy to get the consul aside, without Surdas following, and lead him across the valley and up the hillside to Miss Preston.

As a usual thing McGuire and the pony had a perfect understanding, but now he kicked the fat sides with his heels and urged the pony into a trot, but was jolted quite breathless and soon pulled the reins.

He met people and questioned them in passing. They said Mr. Morris had been at Symonds' in the morning, perhaps was there or near there now, that almost everybody was searching down along the seashore, looking at the foot of rocks—a native had said he had seen a woman there at sunrise.

It was mid-afternoon when McGuire rode into the grounds and came before the house which he now regarded as the prison where Reena had been for so many years under a warder's care. Yet now and many times before she might have told her story, if she knew it, to Mrs. Morris or the consul himself. McGuire pondered doubtfully.

The house was but one story high, the entire roof was thatched, and was surrounded by the usual veranda; this was not entirely screened, but a glance toward the screened part was enough to make him sure that this belonged to Reena.

He rode clear around the house and saw no one. He called, and there was no answer. It seemed that every one was away, assisting in the search. He thought of taking a look inside the house. It was said that Mr. Symonds had indulged himself with the importation of furniture and books such as few planters cared for. McGuire was curious. Curiosity was a weakness that had often got him into trouble, but this time he resisted. Owing to a reputation which caused many persons to regard him mistrustfully, he thought it better not to run the risk of being seen entering the house; moreover, he had best keep looking about for the consul.

He rode on, following the road through a coconut grove and coming, as he had expected, to the workmen's quarters about a mile away. As he rode he saw no one. It was as if a plague had swept the plantation.

It was here, near the workmen, that Zurdas had his own quarters, near the barns, sheds, storerooms and barracks. Thus he could keep a sharper eye on things.

The plague seemed to have passed

here, too. No one was in sight. McGuire shouted, and there was no answer. Zurdas had seemed to feel that he must find the woman or the results might be almost as disastrous as the real plague. It had been incautious of him to talk freely on the veranda in the dark, but years of security had no doubt made him careless.

McGuire a little anxiously noticed that it was beginning to grow late in the afternoon. He poked about inquiringly, here and there, from time to time sending up a coo-ee. It was the most that he could do. He did not know any more in what direction to ride to find the consul than the consul knew in what direction to find the lost woman.

Presently he saw in the distance a group of blacks zigzagging through the coconut grove. He rode toward them. They were grinning and half playful. It had been not unlike a holiday, this knocking about in the bush. Their faces sobered sullenly at the sight of McGuire, for though they did not know him they knew that the white men were this day in more than usual bad temper.

He asked if there had been news of the woman, and their headman grunted and shook his head. McGuire guessed that they were from the New Hebrides, as they were strongly built though rather squat and ape-like of feature. They were surprized that he guessed right and in their dialect. Their attitude changed. When he told his name they clucked and gaped, for they knew of him.

When he now asked of the woman, the headman held out a monkey-like paw, much calloused from handling a hoe, and tipping the palm as if pouring something, said—

"As water on sand, she gone."

They told him that the white man who had been with them had cut across through the grove toward the big house, meaning the Symonds house.

McGuire left and went to find him, but did not overtake him until he came to the house where the fellow was sitting alone on the steps. At the sight of McGuire he arose, came toward him, shouting from a distance:

"Heard anything of 'er?"

McGuire called back—

"Just what I was going to ask."

As he came near the man said with a little surprize, "You're McGuire?" and looked at him with interest.

This overseer, a young fellow, told McGuire that most of the blacks had been sent afield but the old hands had been pushed out to search, adding:

"Need some Australian blackfellows. They'd pick her up. Good as bloodhounds. Better!"

"You haven't seen anything of Mr. Morris?"

"Not a thing. But lots of men from all about came over. They'll never find 'er—alive, that is. She'd be scared to death if nothing else. I've come home a time or two along the road at night from town. Walked, alone an' half drunk too. Got on my nerves a bit."

He said it quite frankly. It was an odd thing to admit frankly, but McGuire replied:

"I know how you feel. You seem to know the air is full of dark things that live and move, and can't be seen. Only you're half afraid you will see 'em. Even lots of natives on lots of islands won't stir out at night. You been here long?"

"Here, you mean? On the plantation? Six months. Two years in the island—too —— many. I don't like it. I keep wonderin' they don't have snakes. That would be ——. One day Zurdas said to me, laughing when I jumped from a stick that turned under my foot, 'In Honduras we had snakes, lots of 'em.' "

"Where?"

"Honduras."

"He didn't mention the snakes in Cuba?"

"No, why? Was he there too once?"

"So they say. But this is the second time today I've heard he was in Honduras, once."

Presently another man came wearily out of the shadows, with clothing torn and

stained, asking the news; then a third, and afterward many blacks. It was late in the afternoon. The search was being abandoned. Other white man came, and lingered here instead of going on to their quarters. They waited for some one who might give them news. As they waited they swore futilely, talking of where they had been searching. A white woman, lost in the jungle, and, seemingly, right at their doorstep.

They sat or stood about in attitudes of weariness, without interest, talking of how a bit of grass, a clump of ferns, could hide a body. The talk shifted rather listlessly from one thing to another, other plantations on other islands, anything to make talk, not because they wanted talk but because they did not want silence. They were a hard-bitten lot; most of them rough, coarse, brutal. If the woman were found later they would curse her for the trouble she had put them to, but while she was lost they were anxious.

McGuire, with little to say, noticed that they had a kind of grudging admiration for Zurdas.

A man who had been pacing up and down, broodingly, pipe in mouth and hands behind him, paused, took out his pipe, raised it above his head, and with head bent forward listened. Then he turned with a shout:

"They're comin'! I hear 'em!"

Talk stopped, men stirred, then became motionless, listening too. A horse neighed in the distance, far away somebody shouted, and they could hear the pattering thud of a galloping horse.

"Got 'er, I bet!"

"No, they've give it up."

"Bet they haven't got 'er."

A horseman came into the road. At the sight of the men waiting there about the steps of the house he flung up a hand and yelled shrilly, and by the yell, which had the sound of triumph, they knew the woman had been found. Gravel splattered like water from under the horse's hoofs as the man drew rein. His sweaty face seemed fairly widened with a grin.

"Found 'er, yes! An' ——, where d'you think? Right on the road! Hi, right in the middle of the road, goin' toward town. Overtook 'er, Zurdas an' us an' Morris! She tried to run. You'd ha' thought she thought we was can'bals! Crazy as ——! She yelled an' fell like dead. They're bringin' 'er now. Where's she been? God knows—plain He didn't want none o' us to know too ain't it? None of us could find 'er! But there she was, right on the road. Middle of it. Yes!"

McGuire sucked on his cold pipe and meditated. Morris, the consul, was with them; what if the woman had tried to tell her story and had told of how she had sent McGuire to find him? McGuire was half-minded to lead his pony quietly to one side and, as it was growing late and shadows were sprawling thickly over the earth, to make off. He did not want to be knocked about by Zurdas' fists; they were big fists, used freely.

"Morris is with them, you say?" he asked.

"Yes," said the horseman. "They've got 'er, and are comin'."

"What did the woman say? Anything?"

"Say? She yelled, I told you, an' fell like dead. Like we was can'bals, I told you."

McGuire, always curious and never very timid, waited, standing to one side inconspicuously.

## VII

THEY came through the late afternoon shadows that were deepening rapidly. It was then, it always was at the close of day, as if the jungle devils who feared the light began to creep abroad with their shadowy bodies as soon as the sun lowered. McGuire's white man's brain scorned devils, but always in the jungle at night he seemed to feel them. Men, old planters, hard-headed fellows, restfully idling of an evening with the whisky bottle by an elbow, had at times admitted that they too could never get over the feeling that something which hid away, sleeping in daylight, did stir and

move through the jungle as night came on. Whisky, loneliness and fever made the presence of these things very real to a man.

Zurdas was accompanied by a few neighbors who had been called in from the search, and their coming was like the return of a border raider. There was no glint or clang of arms, but the jingle of bridle chains, creak of leather, hubbub of voices loud with satisfaction.

Zurdas rode in the lead and, powerful of arm, he held the unconscious woman much as if she were his captive taken in war.

Mr. Morris rode near the side of Zurdas, somewhat behind. He had removed his hat as if to cool a brow, the consular brow, which much anxiety had made sweat. His appearance was almost patriarchal with full red kindly face and white head. To him it was a great relief to have the woman alive, unabused by blacks.

Near Mr. Morris was the cross-eyed doctor, a crabbed bitter man, very conscious of having his eyes twisted, more conscious of having been in years past dismissed as a medical officer in the British navy.

At the other side of Mr. Morris, far too big for his saddle and appearing uncomfortable at being on a horse, was the missionary-magistrate, Cullum, a man who had shown more ability in his younger years than persons were willing now to credit his ponderous slothfulness. The doctor, a man of sour wit, enjoyed a low pun on the magistrate's name, calling him Gull'em.

They came on in a straggling line, some ten or twelve men who had been riding along the beach and following trails. Having abandoned the search for the day, returning up the highway, they had come upon the woman. Others on foot were behind the horsemen, and now that the woman was found, they all came with Zurdas, hardly knowing why, except to talk a bit longer with one another. Symonds came among the last, as if reluctantly.

Zurdas rode close to the steps of the house. Men who had been waiting there pressed forward with arms up to take the woman's body from him as he dismounted, but Zurdas looked down at her —her head was dangling backward, her hair hung as if in tatters—and he seemed unwilling to give her, even unconscious, into any other man's hands. Then, still holding her, her got from the saddle and staggered as if about to fall from the awkwardness of getting off the horse with such a burden. Men's hands steadied him quickly.

Zurdas, without a word, bearing the woman in his arms, stamped up the steps, jerked open a door and disappeared within the room.

Mr. Morris and the doctor followed at once. The ponderous magistrate looked to one side then the other as if wondering how one went about it to get from a horse. Then, with movements as if struggling, he slid off, dragging the saddle down along the horse's side. He shook and pulled at his clothes, rubbed his cramped legs, coughed as though about to speak but, having looked about at those near-by who were busily talking among themselves, he said nothing; then advancing his belly in his usual dignified way, he marched up the steps and into the house.

A lamp had been lighted. Shadows of those within the room could be seen through the windows, and men went on the veranda and squeezed together at the windows, watching. There was still among the men outside a restless helter-skelter of words, disconnected, vivid, with many oaths, much wonder as to where the —— she had been.

The consul, the doctor, the magistrate were with her.

"I couldn't have brought better men to her," McGuire reflected. "She got fearful of waiting, and bolted again for town. I wonder will she tell 'em? Not with Zurdas' eyes on her. He'll keep 'em on her, too. Just as he kept his hands on her."

He saw a figure, like a lonely stranger's,

walk wide of the men and pace slowly with lowered head, going around toward the rear of the house. This was Symonds. He seemed fearfully avoiding what the women might tell, or be telling, within the room.

It was soon quite dark. Matches flared over pipe bowls. Voices of those watching at the windows called, giving news:

"She's like dead." "Unconscious." "Crazy as a bat, I bet."

Men began to move away. The excitement in their tones lessened. It was time to eat. They were weary. The day's work was done.

McGuire got on his pony and rode off, going toward Port Kingston.

There was no particular reason why he should go to town. There had been none when he set out that morning. Now he had it vaguely in mind to go to Mrs. Morris and tell her the woman had been found. The news he had to tell would justify his coming as a messenger, and this would let Reena know. Just why he felt that he wanted to let the girl know, he could not have told.

As he rode he discussed the matter with himself:

"If the truth breaks out, what of it? A crime so many years ago in a far part of the world. Never be punished in this part of the world. From where would proof come? At best it is a fabric of eavesdropping. Reena but a baby, not more than three or four, when they brought her here! How could she know, or who would believe her if she said she knew? And you scared her, you did, in letting her know you knew. She's there in the consul's house. If she's got a story to tell, let her tell it there— Only safe place on Kialo to tell it!"

So, with sudden decision, he turned the pony about and in the darkness returned slowly to the Brade plantation.

## VIII

THE next day they heard at Brades that during the night, sometime after midnight, the crazy woman over at Symonds' had hanged herself. Which, after all, seemed no more than was to be expected—she being crazy.

## CHAPTER III

YOUNG Brade's schooner, freshly stocked with trade goods and ready to sail, swung idly at anchor day after day though favorable winds beckoned him out of the harbor; but the spring race meet was at hand and David stayed for the fun. McGuire, loafing about the town, slept on board the schooner on the nights that he went to bed.

McGuire cared no more about a horse race than a cricket fight, but he liked the holiday crowd, the swarming bustle, the festival finery of planters' wives and daughters, the roistering good-nature of rough men. Also there were sure to be many fights. The men who sweated and tugged in dragging wealth out of the jungle and stuffing it into gunny bags wanted in their holidays rough and biting pleasures, liquor that burned, bets that made them tremble with uncertainty. Often they willfully sought the heady stimulant of a quarrel and cooled their blood with their fists.

During the past week McGuire had listened for any whisper about the death of the Preston woman, and though there had been much talk, no one seemed in the least suspicious that all was not just as had been reported. He ventured to revisit the Symonds plantation, even spoke with Zurdas, but saw no one else. Mr. Symonds was in town and Reena had gone for a ride, old Tomas with her.

McGuire, though he trusted the utter honesty of David Brade, had told him nothing. McGuire was, anyhow, habitually secretive and he regarded David as merely a big fine boy whose earnest face lighted quickly though he only half understood what a joke might be about, and who was altogether too straightforward and direct to be comfortable with so dark a secret. He had nothing at all of McGuire's gift for evasiveness, very like cunning at times. Though David

was quite reckless, he went about even this in a quite serious-minded way.

However, a few days before, McGuire had played with fire. He was in the Benz Brothers general store at Port Kingston, buying tobacco, when Mr. Symonds entered and sat down in a chair near the door, perhaps waiting for one of the proprietors to come from dinner. Mr. Symonds lighted a cigar, leaned back comfortably and seemed contented and patient, but his fingers were not still. It was his habit to be nervously tapping something and often to be rubbing his thumb against the balls of his fingers as if shaking off some invisible power or rubbing away a stain.

McGuire, whittling tobacco for his pipe, said to the clerk—

"When I was in Honduras—"

Then he told a story of no importance. But he had seen Mr. Symonds give a start as if pricked and glance across his shoulder. Then, appearing indifferent, Mr. Symonds looked away, but tipped back his chair with his head cocked, and for a time his restless fingers were motionless as he listened.

As McGuire was leaving the store Mr. Symonds called—

"Ah, by the way, McGuire, where were you born?"

"I? At sea."

"I hear people say you've been quite a wanderer. All about the world, haven't you?"

"No," McGuire answered slowly, "not quite that. I've drifted some—at times had to skedaddle."

"I just heard you mention Honduras. That's a long way from here. When were you there, McGuire?"

He seemed about to ask many questions, and nearly all that McGuire knew of Honduras was what he had but lately got from David Brade's copy of "Findlay's Directory," a very skimpy account indeed, nothing with which to go through even a slight questioning.

"Oh let's see. 'Bout fifteen years ago, or a little less—or maybe a year or two more. I'm vague on dates. Great country. Revolutions going on there all the time. Oh, and I did hear some stories about beautiful women and the duels over 'em. There was a beautiful Spanish woman—" McGuire frowned, as if searching his memory for details—"married to an American—I think he was an American. Or maybe she was in love with the American. I just can't recall now, but it was talked of. Great country! You ever there, Mr. Symonds?"

"Never, McGuire."

With that Mr. Symonds looked away, twitched at his beard, set his teeth in the cigar and indicated that he cared for no further talk.

TO BE CONTINUED

# *Saberless Cavalry*

BY MEIGS O. FROST

FAR back of the memory of living man, the man on horseback has been the man with the sword. The saber always has been the traditional weapon of the cavalry. It is the regulation issue for cavalry today. Yet once there was an outfit of saberless cavalry. Right here in America they fought, on the battlefields of the Civil War. They fought beneath the Stars and Bars. They were Terry's Texas Rangers.

They started out with sabers. But the story of how they finished without them is one of the unwritten episodes of the Civil War. It was told me by Robert O'Brien, private, Company H, of that famous command, at his home on a ranch near Ganado, Jackson County, Texas.

Colonel Terry, a noted figure in Texas in the Sixties, organized and commanded this outfit that was curiously akin to Roosevelt's Rough Riders of the Spanish-American War. Their first rendezvous was at Houston. There they were issued the famous sabers. Jingling like real cavalrymen, they rode from Houston to New Orleans on their own horses. No railroad then joined the two cities.

"We crowded our horses, too," chuckled Robert O'Brien, as he told the story. "It was really a forced march. We wanted to get over East before the war ended."

And the first battle they fought was at Shiloh! There it was that Terry's Texas Rangers became saberless cavalry. Thus it befell:

The morning they rode into action at Shiloh field they had been drawn up in formation waiting orders. The orders came. Out from behind the sheltering woods they trotted. Ahead of them, across the field, was the regiment of blue-clad Union infantry they were to charge. The bugles sang. The shining sabers flashed in the air.

Now one Private William Swinney sat a horse that was his pride, a powerful stallion no other man in the command could master. Crazed by the gun-fire and the bugles and the sweep of the charge, Swinney's mount broke ranks and dashed far out ahead of the charging rangers. Swinney knew it was hopeless to try to check the stallion. Yelling like a demon, brandishing his saber aloft, he drove in his spurs. Up and down the line of Union infantry ahead of him, an officer in blue rode, calling commands to his men to hold their fire. Straight at him Private Swinney galloped.

As the two came together, Swinney swung his saber aloft and slashed at the Union officer with a blow that seemed certain to split his skull. The Northerner swerved. The blow glanced. Twice again, swift as light, Swinney slashed at him. Not one of the three blows was fatal. But as the third blow wounded him in the shoulder, the Union officer with his pistol shot Swinney through the body. The Ranger fell from his saddle.

Every move of this drama had been seen by the Rangers as their charge came thundering on. Whoops and curses sounded as the air was filled with flashing steel—of sabers hurled into the discard. Gripping their horses with their knees, reins flying loose, a frontier percussion-cap Colt six-shooter in both hands of every Ranger, the Texas outfit hit the Union ranks like a thunderbolt. And like a thunderbolt it struck in flame and smoke.

That was the end of the saber for Terry's Texas Rangers. Twice thereafter in the long campaigns that followed, they were issued sabers. Twice thereafter every saber vanished, mysteriously "lost" by riders who met official inquiries with innocent eyes and poker faces.

"Why did we want to tote something around that you could hit a man with three times and then get shot?" asked Uncle Bob O'Brien, as he told the story.

*With the French Foreign Legion in the Sahara*

# The Well of Bitter

INSTEAD of the myriad stars of the Saharan night Paul Lartal awoke to see above him the white ceiling of his room in Fort Hugueny, at Timbuktu. All fatigue had vanished from his muscles. A few hours of rest had wiped out the effect of two hundred miles in the saddle, covered in less than five days.

Through the half open blind he could see the brown line of the defensive wall, clear cut against the blazing sky. By the sounds rising from the yard he was able to know that he had slept far into the morning. He threw aside the light woolen blanket and reached out for the cigarets on a stool at the head of his cot.

As if his movement had released a concealed spring, the door opened and a man appeared. Samadin, huge and black, private in the Second Sudanese Spahis, for half a year orderly to Captain Lartal, stepped into the room, saluted.

"Lieutenant want to see thee, Captain."

"Which one, Samadin?"

"The one who was with thee in *koroko*, Captain."

*Koroko*, in Bambara, means land of salt. By extension, it means the north. Lartal sat up briskly. He knew of only one lieutenant from the north who might want to see him.

"How long has Lieutenant Fontarge been waiting, Samadin?"

"He come morning time, early. He wait maybe one hour, maybe two."

Lartal repressed a first impulse to chide the orderly for not awaking him. But he had given precise instructions that he should be allowed to sleep undisturbed.

"Tell him to come in, Samadin."

The private left and Lartal rose and dressed hurriedly.

In contrast with the very white skin of his lean, muscular body, he appeared to be masked and gloved to the elbows with bronzed leather. Several years on the Algerian desert fringe, followed by eighteen months in the Sudanese Sahel, had tanned the exposed skin deeply. The scarlet and azure of the Spahis' uniform suited perfectly his height and breadth of shoulder. Black crisp hair, gaunt cheeks, with a certain acquired dignity of bearing, the result of long habit of command, might have caused the captain to be mistaken for a Targui but for the clear gray-blue of his eyes.

He was fastening the last hook of the

*A COMPLETE NOVELETTE*

# Waters

By GEORGES SURDEZ

high collar when the door opened again. He turned to offer his hand to Fontarge. The lieutenant was almost as tall as Lartal, longer of limb, red-haired, his face baked to the color of new brick. His white uniform was wrinkled and dingy, the braid faded. The high leather boots showed evidence of long wear.

"Good morning, Pasha," he greeted Lartal, with mock ceremony. "I had to cool my heels since seven, while your faithful henchman guarded your slumber. I recall that big lad as the laziest in my entire platoon. Why did you pick him out for an orderly?"

"He more or less grew into the position. Cut drill to serve me until I lacked the heart to chase him away. You look well. Straight from Bir Ella Ma?"

"Yes. You wouldn't know the old place. New well. Better quarters for the troops."

"How did you get along with my successor?"

"The old fellow? Splendidly. He drank a lot. But all he really cared about was to spend the years separating him from a major's commission as pleasantly as possible. Therefore nothing exciting occurred—save a skirmish with salt smugglers two months ago." Then Fontarge halted his narration of life at Bir Ella Ma. "I'm talking about myself when I should be congratulating you."

Lartal nodded without false modesty. Intimate knowledge of racial customs and prejudices among the people of Islam, ability to speak Arabic, Berber and the various dialects derived from these tongues had added to his prestige as an officer.

"Thanks," he said thoughtfully, "but, as usual, you exhibit a sure instinct for saying the wrong thing at the right moment. I was sent last week to obtain a treaty of allegiance from a Kounta chieftain. Rode there and back—I got back only last night—talked until my throat was sore, cajoled, promised, pleaded and achieved nothing. He thinks that the French will leave the Timbuktu region before long and fears to commit himself, fears to be left exposed to reprisals by the dissidents after our departure."

"You must have had a rotten time."

"Not so bad. The old fellow was perfectly willing to consider me, as a private individual, his best friend. But as

far as anything official was concerned he slipped aside gracefully. You know the chance we have to obtain a straight answer from a native when he's determined to avoid answering."

Samadin entered, bearing Lartal's breakfast on a tray, for the captain had risen too late to take his place at the mess. Fontarge, with an ironical smile, enumerated the dishes.

"Half a cold chicken, hard boiled eggs, bread fresh from the oven, fruit, a bottle of white wine, coffee—you refuse yourself nothing, old man!"

"I've been eating native food for five days," Lartal protested. "Samadin had lost my supplies, or at least that's what he claimed. I ate *kusskussu*, roast mutton from the common dish, honey, and washed it down with sour milk. I'm establishing an equilibrium. Help yourself, if you're hungry."

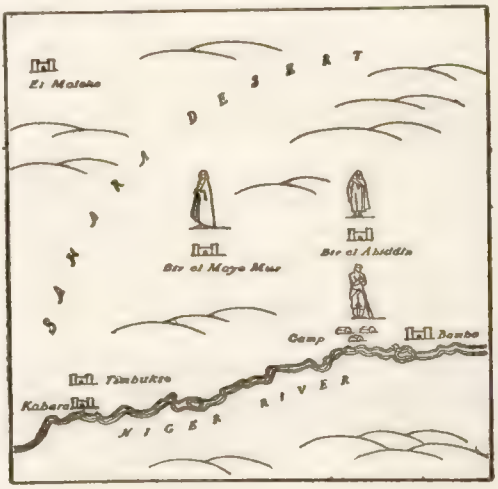
"While waiting for you to call me I joined the mess table."

"In that case, you'll find cigarets around somewhere. You used to like my brand."

Lartal and Fontarge had known each other for many years. They had been brought up in the same calm provincial city. When Lartal was twelve he had left for boarding school. Upon graduation he had entered St. Cyr, the military academy. Fontarge entered St. Cyr a few months before Lartal's departure. Then the two had lost sight and knowledge of each other for several years. They had met again many miles north of Timbuktu when Lartal was assigned to command the outpost of Bir Ella Ma. Their friendship had been immediately resumed even though in the intervening years their lives had been wide apart.

Lartal had piloted small detachments in the immensity of the Sahara. Fontarge had been garrisoned near Paris. A loss at cards, and he had sought service in Africa rather than face an open change in his style of living. Arriving in the Sudan at the end of the Samory wars, he had seen much service against the black tribes, and more than a little, following that, against the Moors and Tuareg of the Sahel. A brave soldier, a very capable officer; a quick tongue and too great independence of manner had kept him from speedy promotion.

At Bir Ella Ma, Fontarge had seconded Lartal during the defense of the fort, besieged by bands of Berabers and dissident Tuareg tribesmen led by the Tafilalet leader, Moktar el Khiani. The third




white officer in the outpost, Captain de Vallier, had met his death. Lartal had been recalled to Timbuktu soon after his successful stand against the native foes of France and had been assigned to diplomatic work among the Moslem people near the Niger River. Fontarge had remained at the outpost, serving under the veteran captain who had succeeded Lartal. They had been separated several months and had not corresponded directly.

"By the way, what kind wind blew you into Timbuktu?" Lartal asked suddenly.

"Recall that I'm a second sojourn man. And that I have been out two years this trip. Therefore I'm due for leave."

Lartal looked at him steadily, his interest aroused by a certain diffident note in his voice.

"How long will you be gone?"

"Six months—longer, perhaps."

The captain shrugged.

"I had hoped to—but, never mind."

Fontarge returned his glance with a hint of defiance.

"I might as well confess now and take what's coming. I may not come back to the Sudan."

"You mean to leave the service?"

"Yes."

"Funk or marriage?" Lartal asked dryly.

"Neither. Common sense."

"You speak like a fool," Lartal said wearily. "You'll want to come back. This will call you."

"Perhaps. But frankly, what can I do out here? I know I'm not popular with the cabbages in charge. Too big a mouth. I have been passed up for promotion and will be again."

"There are things that compel promotion."

Fontarge rolled up one sleeve, showed a long puckered seam dug deep into the flesh.

"That—and four more honored scars on assorted parts of my anatomy!" He laughed. "Came here with two stripes; am leaving with two. Five years in Africa, five wounds—"

"You'll serve under me—and—"

"I'm willing enough to be favored, old man, but with your narrow mind, you'd be remorseful after pushing me ahead through friendship."

"Blockhead! Who spoke of favor?"

"What then?"

"Remember what you said a few months ago when Captain de Vallier was executed by the Berabers?"

"I was quite loquacious, I suppose."

"You prayed for another opportunity to meet Moktar el Khiani."

Fontarge lost his calm, his face changed, his hands tightened.

"I still do. But what chance have I? My request to serve against him is rejected in advance. And, moreover, I have had little experience with camel troops. Everybody knows that the camelmen will be sent north against the old brigand. You'll go, but not I."

Lartal smiled.

"I already have refused command of the camel company that will be sent north."

"Why?"

"Because I know perfectly well that Moktar will outwit the camel company. He'll have the whole Sahara in which to maneuver, and will slide by them some fine night. We're now at the end of August. In, let us say, three or four months, Moktar will be close to Timbuktu. And that's the place to get him."

"Bravo!" Fontarge applauded mockingly. "Beautifully calculated! But how, when and where will you find him? And how will you have enough troops at hand when you do locate him to defeat him? He trimmed you rather neatly about a year ago."

"He did. But he will not next time," Lartal said, adding immediately, half seriously, "please Allah!"

"Don't talk wildly, Lartal. It does not suit you."

"I like to talk," Lartal retorted. "And, if I dream of capturing Moktar, why should you blame me? Fate has pushed my face against his for years, until I feel that the matter has become personal. I first heard of him in Algeria. My Chambaa mentioned him constantly. I trailed him far into the Draa region once, but he had six days advance."

"When all he needed was six hours," Fontarge put in.

"I came down to the Sudan soon after my best friend Lieutenant Tranchet had been killed in the desert while following Moktar. I was appointed to second Captain Ruault, who was leading a detachment northward. Ruault was a great fellow, a good officer, clever as you can wish. Yet Moktar led us into a trap, our sub-lieutenant, young Ferisson, was killed. Ruault lost his nerve, blew up. And I, to confess the truth, did not quite know what I was doing. By what miracle we brought our bunch of cripples back to Araouan Well I'll wonder to my last day. A few weeks later I was sent to Bir Ella Ma to keep an eye on Captain de Vallier, who showed traces of—

nervousness. You recall what occurred."

"Too well for my peace of mind."

"Tranchet, Ferisson, Ruault, de Vallier, others before them. Did you note, Fontarge, how fighting Moktar brings evil luck on French officers?"

"Yes. Meeting him too often ends fatally." Fontarge suddenly gripped Lartal's wrist. "I'm leaving the Sudan half because I don't want to see any one else go against the old fellow, when I'd give my blood to go. They're speaking of putting me back on the Sierra Leone frontier, my next sojourn. I couldn't stand that—being so near.

"Will you delay your leave, if I can promise you—"

Fontarge reached for the bottle of wine, filled a glass.

"But you can't. Here's to health, comfort and the rusting sword over the mantel!"

"I have been granted freedom to select my second among the cavalry officers present in Timbuktu and the region depending on it. Unless I'm much mistaken, Moktar el Khiani's trip at the end of this year will prove his last one to the Sudan."

Fontarge, after a brief hesitation, drained his glass.

"Others have said that before you," he said.

"Others were not myself. Don't lay that to conceit, Fontarge. I claim superior courage to none of them, superior ability to but few. But I have greater experience. I have their mistakes to guide me—and the real art of any warfare is the gradual elimination of mistakes, until the perfect system is attained."

"I have no faith in ready-made plans, Lartal. Only one thing counts: Find your target and smash into it."

"Yes, but find before smashing. I tell you that I will know precisely when and where to find Moktar. I'll have sufficient forces ready to crush him."

"You'll need certitude."

"I have certitude."

"How?"

"I'll explain."

"And you'll have me assigned as your second?"

For answer Lartal went to a trunk, opened it and tossed an envelop on the table.

"I was holding that until the time was ripe. Signed, stamped, in order. Your transfer to my unit."

"Wait a minute," Fontarge interjected as he scanned the sheet. "We've been separated for months. You never wrote me—and yet you thought of me for this. You're a friend—"

"That's not my only reason. To assign you I had to shunt aside a likable young lieutenant, actually my second. He'll never forgive me, I suppose. But he's really too young, too new to the Sudan. I want this job ahead of me to succeed. You, who have seen the handiwork of Moktar, will be inspired. I know your qualities and your faults. The other man is untried. Samadin, take the tray away! Bring your chair nearer the table, Fontarge, I have a few thing to show you."

"What are those?" Fontarge asked curiously, indicating a sheaf of small papers that Lartal placed on the table together with the official map supplied the officers serving in the Timbuktu region.

"That will come in due time," Lartal replied. "You will recall that Captain de Vallier, in the notes he left, informed us that Moktar el Khiani had told him, de Vallier, that nothing that happened among us in the Sudan was unknown to him."

"I do recall that."

"To obtain information from his agents in the Sudan, Moktar must perforce keep those agents informed of his movements. That is," Lartal remarked smilingly, "unless we admit practical telepathy. We don't."

"Therefore you—"

"I concentrated upon locating one of those agents—and one willing to talk. Timbuktu is filled with Moors, with vague characters of many races. Somewhere Moktar's agents were placed, seeing everything, hearing everything."

"Not bad reasoning, Lartal."

"I couldn't personally seek the agents out. My uniform would not inspire confidence in natives who have an understanding with Moktar. At first I thought of employing Samadin and a couple of fairly intelligent blacks to do a bit of scouting. I soon gave up the idea. They would have been no match in wits for the other fellows, whom I suspected of being Moors and Arabs. While on trips along the Niger banks, I looked everywhere for a man who could give me information. Uselessly."

"But you finally obtained it?" Fontarge asked.

"Did you ever hear of Ibrahim Babemba Bakary?"

"Captain Bakary, the negro officer?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"I saw him in action once. A man with the strength of a gorilla and the courage of a lion. What does he do in this?"

"Everything. You know that Bakary, starting as a private twenty-odd years ago when we were still marking time in Senegal, is the only negro of his rank in the Sudan. He deserved the commission for his bravery. Nevertheless, his appointment created quite a problem. You know that a native non-com can in no case give orders to a white man inferior in rank. Even the lieutenants are carefully shifted about to avoid a difficult situation. But a captain—you understand? The military governor, who doesn't lack ingenuity, sought for a way out, a graceful way which would not harm his dignity nor hurt Bakary's pride. Bakary was assigned to diplomatic work among the negro tribes."

"Not a bad idea," Fontarge assented. "But Bakary believed in fighting rather than fine speeches, if I remember rightly. I never saw him so pleased as at the Baninko, when he had Samory's warriors trapped in the dried bed of a river and was directing his men's fusilade."

"But Bakary is partly Senegalese, Ouolof. Therefore he loves to orate, and he loves secrecy. Not satisfied with obtaining treaties and settling native affairs, he brought back such complete reports of conditions in areas he inspected that he was assigned to the Information Bureau in Bamako. He speaks a multitude of lesser dialects. The patois of the river Somonos is as familiar to him as the high and lowcast Poular of the Fouta. When a small boy he mixed with the Moors of the Senegalese Adrar and learned Druya Chloh from the visiting Berabers. He came to Timbuktu when I was most puzzled over that smuggling evil that had us on edge. And Bakary settled it."

"How?"

"As you know, flocks of sheep, herds of cattle came into the pasture-land near the Niger without paying the tax of two and one-half per cent. But though we had patrols on guard everywhere, we could never catch the smugglers in the act. The system was simple: A few of the cattle or sheep would be driven by a tax-collecting station, the guardians would obtain a paper covering them. Later they joined large smuggled groups and when halted by the native patrols, whose leaders could not read, the smugglers offered the paper for inspection. Seeing the official stamps, the native non-com would be satisfied. Bakary discovered the trick, taught several of the sergeants and corporals to read figures—and all was well."

"An intelligent man!"

"In his own way," Lartal agreed. "He is vain as a peacock of his erudition. Not a bad sort. He would not disgrace a white hide if Allah had seen fit to grant him one. He has not been wearing a uniform much of late, since assigned as secret agent. He dresses like a wealthy negro trader, which in fact he is, for he conducts private business in addition to the official. What is a closed book to us here is as clear as rock-crystal to him. I took him into my confidence and suggested that he might be permitted to help me."

"I begin to understand."

"In Timbuktu he has friends in the

Butchers' Quarters, who in turn have acquaintances in the Cattle Market, near the Sankore Mosquee. These friends are principally high class Tukuleurs who speak Arabic. Bakary, without revealing his purpose, asked them to report their conversations and observations. We detected, or I should say he detected, several men undoubtedly interested in the doings of French officers, in the strength and locations of patrols and detachments, in transfers of officers from one post to another, in the creation of new camel units. Several of these he identified as servants of one man, and came to the conclusion that that particular fellow was the center of espionage."

"Who is he?"

"I recommend you not to repeat it, Fontarge. He is a good friend, officially, of the French government. A Moor of Moroccan origin, a wealthy trader, Mohammed el Saleh ben el Fassi."

"Mohammed the virtuous, son of the man from Fez," Fontarge translated. "I know of him. A gray-bearded, stately old chap who pays his respects to the military governor regularly. But as he is a trader and Moktar is a raider, it seems to me that they would be natural foes."

"Not at all. Did you ever hear of El Saleh's caravan being looted? A little investigation proved to Bakary and me that he had been known as Moktar's friend before our arrival. Given El Saleh as a center, Bakary radiated. And he located Biska ag Tissek, caravan leader for El Saleh these many years, native of the Draa plateau. Tissek was the man to question."

"And who will pay him for his information?" Fontarge wondered. "Not the government, if I know anything of its ways. Miserly in important matters and throwing gold away by the handful in small issues."

"There are other motives besides greed that actuate a man."

"A woman—hatred—devotion to duty on rare occasions."

"And revenge. Tissek is a man with a grievance. He incurred Moktar's dislike several years ago and instead of killing him, with that grim sense of humor that marks the Beraber, Moktar el Khiani mutilated Tissek, played upon him one of those typically Arabic tricks that hold up a man to ridicule. At the time, Tissek was a man, not a youth. With true philosophy, he pretended to forget, bowed to accomplished fact. And the season following he met Moktar at the appointed spot, handled his master's business and smiled gravely, patiently. Moktar el Khiani at the time was all-powerful. Bakary, who has a knack all his own of learning things, was not slow in discovering Tissek's story and came to me with it. And Tissek, after a period of approach, melted and agreed to help us."

"Did you speak with him yourself?"

"How could I, without inviting all Timbuktu to share the secret?"

"Nevertheless I'd try to ascertain facts personally."

"That's what I intend to do. Bakary is at present in Timbuktu, and I arranged by letter several days ago that he should call for me tonight and take me to meet Tissek. That is one of the reasons I was forced to cut short my mission and return."

"Are you going to meet him in uniform?"

"No. In a *gandoura.*"

"And in his home?"

"Yes."

"Risky."

"What else can I do? By morning I hope to be able to talk intelligently about our plans." He picked up the papers. "You recognize the official map. You know that this map shows the various water-holes reported by our geographical missions, as far north as Araouan. I have here sketches made by myself up north and in the vicinity of Timbuktu, some of them covering the Niger banks as far as Bamba.

"I have also, here, sketches made by other officers and pinned to reports—some of your own among them. But more important I have others drawn up from native indications, revealing wells

in the sandy regions as yet not shown on our maps; wells that exist only during a certain time of the year and disappear with the coming of the dry season. I have noted the various names given each by the various tribes. You read Arabic and Berber to some extent?"

"Arabic—with the assistance of the precious tome published in Beyrouth, composed by the Jesuits in 1883. Berber and Tamahek, with the help of Hanoteau's book. Enough to unravel easy names."

"I'll make a copy of my revised maps for you, with notes. Accurate maps will be needed, perhaps. Not the hit-or-miss general outline affairs we are given, but serviceable maps. Here's mine."

Lartal exhibited his work.

"I don't guarantee the graphic triangulation and astronomical azemuth, but I think that a man of average intelligence can get about with these. Using the official map as a canvass, I added personal knowledge and information derived from maps drawn on the sand by natives for my inspection. See that line? That's Moktar el Khiani's route as far as the ruins north of Taoudeni.

"My map differs from the official map, but when I tried to give it to the officer commanding the camel company he smiled and shook his head. He wants his information nicely engraved, with red lines indicating the routes followed by Caille, Douls and Panet. He'll keep to the well defined roads, while Moktar will calmly circle by-paths of his own, broken by smaller wells unknown to us thus far. But in a way I'm rather glad that he refused. He'll allow Moktar to come down to us."

"You'll need a couple of companies of *tirailleurs* and forty cavalrymen with you to tackle Moktar el Khiani. That amounts to an expedition of considerable importance. Some major or other will step in at the last moment."

"Lieutenant-Colonel Corbinot, the military commander here, had promised me the necessary infantry and cavalry. He is a good chief, and I don't believe he'll allow any one to slide me aside. In any case, the important thing is not whether I get the credit but whether Moktar is caught."

"You're admirably kind-hearted," Fontarge pointed out.

"Because I feel safe enough. I suppose if I were really placed under another man I'd pop a blood-vessel and die. It is for us to accomplish, Fontarge."

"It sounds fine. But I scarcely dare hope—"

"It's all in the hand of Allah. By the way, the quarters are reserved for some new arrivals from Bamako, due tomorrow or the following day. And I don't want you to ask shelter at Fort Bonnier with the infantrymen. I'll have a cot put up in here."

"Thanks."

"While waiting for Bakary there isn't much to do. I'm free of duty until tomorrow morning. Nothing grows on dry soil. I'll send Samadin for another bottle. And," he finished with a laugh, "we can baptize your captain's stripes in advance."

HINGES creaked in the darkness.

"Follow me," Bakary said in Arabic.

Lartal passed from the narrow street into the pocket of obscurity gaping beyond the door. Again came the creaking of hinges, sinister, with the mournful squeal of a vault-gate clanging shut.

Separated from the street by the iron-bound, nail-studded door four inches thick, Bakary dropped into French, which he spoke well, even if somewhat pompously; he had read and composed so many official documents that he involuntarily employed long words.

"This is an auspicious situation, if you have anything further to ask me in French. This, where we find ourselves, is but an outside building, an outer house. We shall therefore be forced to cross an open yard of considerable width—where there may possibly be found those who do not like the sound of *our* tongue."

For a moment Lartal remained silent,

his back against the wall. This escapade upon which he had embarked might prove dangerous, not only for himself, but for his guide as well. Tissek's attitude increased the danger: The man feared assassination, or more rightly, execution, should he be discovered by El Saleh. On El Saleh's property Lartal and Bakary were not much safer than Tissek.

Bakary, who could not be accused of timidity, had at first discouraged the idea of disguise. He maintained that a European in native garb would be conspicuous by his gait. Lartal had reminded the native officer that he had worn *burnous* and *gandoura* in Algeria when he had found the binding uniform too uncomfortable for prolonged travel. Bakary had tested him and declared himself satisfied.

In uniform Lartal would have run no danger within Timbuktu. The chastisement awaiting the city should a Frenchman be attacked or even offended on the streets was full guarantee of immunity. But not only would Tissek have refused to receive him, but Lartal's progress through the crowded streets after nightfall would have attracted widespread attention, with the gleam of gold on cuffs and *képi* heralding his approach. The two had left Fort Hugueny quietly, shortly after nine o'clock, and there had been nothing to distinguish them from the figures bundled in blue and white wandering about the city.

Once or twice Bakary had warned Lartal to lengthen his stride, and to take more deliberate steps, for the soldierly tread drilled into him by years in the army might have betrayed him. Bakary himself had nothing to fear. For him the French uniform was the masquerade. Awkward in European garments, stiff and constrained, somewhat ridiculous because of his habit of wearing white gloves on his enormous hands, Bakary was a fine figure in white robes.

After the door closed behind them Lartal, despite his eagerness, was conscious of stepping into another world. The streets of Timbuktu were controlled by his kind. El Saleh's house was beyond their scope. Presuming that Tissek had informed his master, because of a belated qualm of conscience, Lartal and his companion would be knifed without opportunity for defense. The bodies would vanish. Fontarge knew where Lartal had gone, but search would reveal little. There would be no proof.

"Is this El Saleh's place?" Lartal asked.

"It does belong to him. But his residence is nearer the Sankore Mosquee, close to the Cattle Market. Tissek, who is head of all his servants in Timbuktu, has a small house in this yard, although, being a son of the tents, he usually inhabits a tent outside the city. But tonight he will come here."

"And the other buildings—for there are others?"

"Storerooms, Captain. There you will find rock-salt from Taoudeni in great plaques of oblong shape, dates from the Touat Oases, fancy leather from Tafilalet, bales of cloth from England via Morocco, Turkish goods come via Tripoli, gold dust from the Boure, ostrich feathers, Sudanese cloth, small articles of trade, knives, glassware, chinaware, copper pans from Europe —he has a great fortune here amassed in merchandise. In the yard which we soon will cross the slaves were kept while awaiting the forming of caravans that would take them north across the Sahara. One can still see rusting chains hanging from the walls, which were used to fasten those who did not accept their lot as Allah commanded they should."

"Poor devils—"

Bakary spat disdainfully.

"Slaves they were, of slave races. Grinning fools without pride. The true warriors were not made slaves." He paused, chuckled sonorously. "But have we come here to talk of such things? Go on, striding slowly. If we meet any one speak as I speak."

Lartal followed him. He hoped that the light at no time would fall fully on his face, which was but partially veiled. Although bronzed by the sun, his complexion did not attain the swarthiness of

Moor or Arab. Tissek had probably prepared for their arrival, for the yard was almost empty. In a far corner a few women squatted; Lartal could discern by their discreet laughter. A small child ran toward them perhaps thinking one of the tall men was his father. Bakary drove him off with a gesture.

At length the native captain led the way into another cube of masonry, through a narrow hall lighted by a hanging lamp of brass from which emerged a sputtering wick. Without hesitation, like a man who knows his road, Bakary lifted hangings and the two men entered a small room.

This apartment was tiled along the walls to a height of five feet. Carpets covered the floor. There was a sort of low divan on one side and a few big cushions on the floor before it. A small samovar, heated by a central chimney which held smoldering charcoal, was placed on the floor near the divan on a plate of copper which also showed an array of cups, small goblets of porcelain in copper frames. Lartal speculated with amusement on the travels of this Russian object, drifted now to the Sudan.

Bakary gestured to Lartal to occupy the divan. He himself sank on the cushions.

"He whom we have come to see will be here soon," he stated. "Do not rise when he enters and speak as a master speaks."

In the long pocket that hangs in front of every *gandoura* Lartal had concealed a revolver, not the heavy cumbersome service weapon, but a dainty object of burnished metal, easier to handle in an emergency. His right hand met the comforting cold of the barrel.

Bakary had seen his movement, as he saw all things within range of his bloodshot eyes. Thick purplish lips parted in a grim smile. He thrust his right hand slightly to the front and the hilt of a knife slid into the palm as if shot forward by a steel spring. Another slight movement of the wrist, and the knife vanished. Lartal realized that the wide sleeves of the *gandoura* were not only ornamental.

"He come!" Bakary warned.

In fact, Lartal could hear light steps in the hall.

Then Tissek entered the room, and saluted ceremoniously.

He was older than Lartal had imagined, at least fifty. His face was brown, negroid. Very tall, he seemed heavier in build than other desert men Lartal had seen. His face, which he bared upon his entrance, as if to show his confidence, was almost beardless, and his cheeks were seamed with tiny wrinkles. He spoke with a thin, soft voice, surprizing in so large a man.

Bakary, very much at home, motioned for him to take place on the cushions at his side. Having greeted his visitors in Arabic, Tissek went on in the Chloh dialect of Tafilalet which Lartal understood with difficulty.

"Speak in Arabic," Bakary advised him.

"Thou art Biska ag Tissek, trusted servant of Mohammed el Saleh ben el Fassi, honored and wealthy merchant of this city?" Lartal began.

"I am, Sidi Captain."

"Of what people art thou, Tissek?"

"A Moor—from Marrakesh."

Lartal smiled coldly.

"A true Moor of Mulai Yakub, I think."

Mulai Yakub is a saint of Islam, patron of the Haradin water-carriers who labor in Moroccan cities. A Haradin will call himself a true Moor, but a Moor will never claim to be a Haradin.

"It is therefore likely," Bakary put in, "that thou canst speak Druya even better than Chloh."

"To those who already know, nothing can be told," Tissek admitted with a smile. "But thou hast indeed come far to talk only of me, sidi."

"Far—and in a strange garb, true, Tissek. I am told that thou dost know where Moktar el Khiani, also known as El Filali the Berber, can be found when he is close to Timbuktu. Is that true?"

"It is, sidi."

"Not only will thy hurt be repaid,

Tissek, but I will give thee a reward. Twenty-five French gold coins."

"If reward there be, let it be in English gold, which is better. Twenty *guinea-inglissi*, sidi, will satisfy me. Recall that I did not ask, but that thou didst offer."

Tissek settled himself on the cushions, shook his arms free of the enveloping sleeves.

"For these many years, each and every year, for every year, for every caravan that has come either from Taoudeni or Morocco for my master, my master had paid tribute to Moktar el Khiani to secure his goods against attack. To avoid quarrels over values it was decided almost at the beginning that Moktar would not take his due from the caravans themselves, but that my master would figure what he owed and send him what was needed at a given spot on a given day."

"I understand thy words, Tissek."

"They are clear words. This year, after the return of the caravans which went north long ago under a man I trained myself, the same payment will be made. I know the spot. But as yet, I do not know the day or the hour."

"Where is the spot?"

"At Bir el Abiddin,* which is to the north of Bamba on the Niger. I shall warn thee, sidi, when the day has come."

"How many men will he have with him, dost thou know?"

"Not many. He will leave most of his followers, as he does each year, at El Maleka where there is plenty of water and pasture land for the camels. He will come to Bir El Abiddin with but a few men and the pack camels needed to transport the goods paid as tribute."

"How many men?"

"Sometimes as few as fifteen and at the most a score and a half. That explains," Tissek said with a smile, "that which has puzzled you for so long—why Moktar is beaten with great ease by your men near Bamba or Gao, while he is a very lion in the desert."

"Do not our patrols investigate why the goods go to such an unusual spot and why their guardians come back soon without them?"

Tissek grimaced with pity.

"Your patrols— The Niger is very, very long and the patrols few. And instead of taking straight paths well known to all men, such as that which goes through Bamba to Bir el Mabruk,* we cross and recross south of the river, sometimes going as far as the Kidal path, then we come back westward to Bir el Abiddin. And there Moktar el Khiani awaits us."

Lartal was thoughtful for a few moments.

"Tissek, the spot is near Bamba. If I brought my soldiers in advance to Bamba or even Rhergo or any place between the two, would it not warn Moktar el Khiani?"

"It would not. There are some of your soldiers moving along the river constantly of late. It would be best, though, to send them by boats, to make all men believe they were but traveling to Gao."

"A good thought, Tissek. How wilt thou inform me of the day and the hour when we may seek Moktar el Khiani?"

"I can not come and tell thee myself, sidi, for I will lead the animals carrying the goods. "

"There will be bullets flying. Take care thou art not harmed."

"Be at peace, sidi. When bullets fly I will hide. Dost thou read these?"

Tissek, with his finger, traced several Tiffinar characters on the floor between the rugs. Lartal, who followed his movements with attention, nodded.

"Allah is great," he translated.

"It is well. I have a young boy, a black, who was born and brought up near me. He has scarcely reached the years when he may wear a *bila*,† but he knows all there is to know and ignores what is to be ignored. I shall give him a message for thee."

"Will he find me?"

"All men know thee, Captain. And always one has but to ask on the market

* The Well of the Slaves.

* The Well of the Blessed One. † Loin-cloth.

place, 'Where is the chief, Lartal?' and the answer is given promptly."

This was a delicate compliment paid Lartal by Tissek, and the captain acknowledged it with a nod.

"But dare not fail, Tissek! If I am made to go on a fool's errand, I'll have only to speak and the long knives on the rifles of my soldiers will be in thy ribs."

"There is no need of threats, Captain. Now my life is already in thy hands. But whisper to my master that I have spoken so much and I will die."

"Will he harm thee after? For he will know some one has spoken."

"No. He does not love the Berber overmuch. He is his friend through necessity, it being best to be Moktar el Khiani's friend when one has caravans in the Sahara."

"And the Berber is no friend of thine, is he?"

"That he is not. I have not forgotten, Allah knows."

"What hadst thou done to displease him?"

"Taken, with the caravan belonging to Mohammed el Saleh, a smaller caravan, through pity, to save them from pillage. My master's tribute did not cover them. Moktar learned, as he learned many things. The punishment was perhaps just, but revenge is no less just."

Bakary, seeing that Lartal was about to rise and end the interview and not wishing the captain to lose even the slightest prestige by rising first, grasped Tissek's arm and drew him erect. So that Lartal had seemed the master throughout, according to custom. He had been seated first and risen last.

"Wilt thou drink?" Tissek asked.

"No."

Another exchange of compliments followed and the two officers left. The yard was now completely deserted and they reached the street without meeting any one.

When they were in the open, where they could converse at ease, Bakary turned to Lartal.

"Why didn't you accept his tea?"

"I don't know."

"Because he did not refuse the gold pieces? Because, even though it is to your disadvantage, he is betraying a man of his faith, his race, while permitting that man to believe him loyal. Had there been no talk of money would you have drunk his tea?"

"Perhaps."

"We Moslems are a strange people, you say, because we eat with the fingers of the right hand. Because we have many women legally. You won't drink tea with Tissek—that is not strange!"

Lartal laughed.

"But we're not going to the fort."

"No," Bakary admitted. "We're going to the home of a friend. Do not fear—there is a bed such as Europeans use, very clean. There are even cigarets and wine. Were you to go back to the fort dressed as you are now, at this time, the sentry would keep you away. You would not wish them all to know what you had done. And perhaps—the sentry being black, and not intelligent— It would be a strange, a very strange thing, to find Captain Lartal dead, in a *gandoura!*"

Barkary laughed loudly.

"Men would believe—that you had gone on private business rather than a soldier's duty."

LARTAL was awakened at dawn by Bakary and told that Samadin had brought his horse. In a few minutes he rode into the fort.

He noticed that there was unusual activity for that time of day, but did not question either his lieutenant, whom he saw chortling orders near the stables, nor any of the white non-coms he passed before reaching his quarters.

Fontarge was still in bed, but awake. Lartal noticed with a smile that the lieutenant had been consulting the sketches offered him the preceding morning.

"Hello," Fontarge greeted him. "Not a bad idea, having four or five different maps to show the water holes at various times of the year. They do shift around quite a bit."

"Yes. Some dry up and others appear elsewhere. But, I thought by this time you'd be dragging out searching parties to find me."

Fontarge explained that Captain Bakary, before leaving for town with Lartal, had warned Samadin not to expect his master before morning and had later sent a boy to inform him that Lartal was waiting for his horse. Samadin now brought out Lartal's dress uniform, pinning the decorations in their proper places.

"What art thou doing there?" Lartal chided.

"Inspection today."

"Not for me. Bring out the whites."

"Inspection for everybody."

"Why?"

Samadin, surprized by the question, straightened and gaped.

"No savvy, Captain. Major said everybody. Colonel said everybody. Sergeant tell me get these ready or go to lockup."

"Put those boots down and call the sergeant, quick!" Samadin left and Lartal turned to Fontage. "There's something up, that's a fact. I saw my lieutenant serenading the stable guards as I rode in. But the deuce take me if I'll trot out into the sun for any one!"

Sergeant Gautier, a young fellow not long in the Sudan, came in, saluted and remained at attention, waiting for Lartal to speak, as he would have done in the barracks in France.

"Take it easy," Lartal invited him, "and preserve your energy to fight the heat. What's happened? What's this talk I hear about inspection?"

"Governor Dufaure arrived at Kabara during the night, on the gunboat *Monge*, Captain. He will be here by ten or eleven o'clock. Officers, non-commissioned officers and privates present at the fort to be ready—"

"Thank you, Gautier. As you know I've been away several days. Is everything in order? I don't want to get my head lathered by a civilian for presenting a dirty bunch of tramps."

"Lieutenant Garros and myself have taken care of everything, Captain. Rest assured of that."

"Have all the privates been issued the new breeches?"

"Yes, Captain."

"You may go."

After the non-com had left, Fontarge rose wearily.

"All present at the fort—that includes me. Queer little fellow, that Gautier. Snappy black eyes he has. Serious, though."

"New and enthusiastic," Lartal explained, as he pulled on the shining boots offered him by Samadin. "You've heard of his father, Raoul Gautier? Consul in the Near East. Then in Morocco. Sergeant Gautier knows Arabic and Berber better than I do. Is now digging at Tamehek and making good progress. When you can get him to loosen up he's interesting. Had him with me on one or two trips and never was bored a moment."

"As long as I stay with you, Lartal, I'll take him under my wing. There's the making of a clever officer there."

"He'll be glad to have a new lieutenant. Without wishing to rap Garros, I think he is a bit harsh. He's newly promoted, and astride dignity from morning till night. Did you see him?"

"Middle-sized man, twenty-five or six, long teeth and no chin?"

"Yes. Not only an officer but a moral censor."

Fontarge, who had found his own dress uniform in a trunk, and was supervising Samadin's brushing, laughed.

"In a year or so he'll be seasoned. When I first came—"

"Put your boots on and narrate your memoirs later," Lartal invited.

He went into the yard, and found his troopers ready, mounted. Neat as a painted tin soldier new from a box, Lieutenant Garros sat his little horse some distance from the others. He nodded reassuringly to Lartal.

"All in order, Captain."

The captain mounted Griot, the big Macina stallion, and moved out before his

men. They sat straight in the saddles, chests swelling the red tunics, buttons agleam, black faces seeming even blacker under the pipe-clayed helmets on which glistened the star and crescent moon, emblem of the corps. There was not a speck of rust on a single scabbard, the breech-locks of the carbines were polished and greased.

"Fine work, Garros."

"Something of a feat to obtain neatness from a bunch of slobs such as they are," Garros commented.

Lartal, who had come to know the black Spahis, glanced at his lieutenant, but refrained from the sharp reply that rose to his lips, and shrugged. With his present attitude, Garros could exact cleanliness, but he certainly had made no steps toward acquiring devotion.

Major Delaurier, stationed near that gate of the fort which was to receive the governor—Lieutenant-Colonel Corbinot, military commander of the Timbuktu region, had gone forth to meet him—waved his gloved hand toward Lartal in greeting. Then, under an increasingly hot sun, the cavalrymen waited.

Long minutes dragged, an hour passed, before a group of Spahis trotted into the fort, preceding the civil governor and his suite. Dufaure, Governor of the Colony of High Senegal and Niger, was mounted on a mule and was evidently eager to get afoot once more. He passed immediately to the principal building, where he dismounted with the assistance of an obsequious follower. This done, Dufaure retraced his steps, to inspect the cavalrymen.

Lartal watched Dufaure curiously. There was much evil spoken of the man, and very little good. It was a matter of common knowledge that his first step in the colonial administration had been helped by disgraceful methods. His work in various French colonies, particularly in Guadalupe, had not been noteworthy for progress achieved or honesty. Nevertheless he now represented the French Republic in the eyes of several million natives

Dufaure was of medium height, about forty-five years of age. Thin shoulders, thin legs, sagging jowls and protruding belly, he did not offer a martial appearance. His face, soft and white, was protected by an immense mushroom of gray felt, termed, for want of a better name, sun-helmet. His eyes were muddy-blue. Gold braid ornamented his sleeves and collar; on his left breast one might behold a perfect rainbow of ribbons, from which hung crosses of enamel, silver and gold.

Lieutenant-Colonel Corbinot, who escorted the governor, was a tall, wiry man under fifty, straight as a lance. His face was keen, tanned, slashed by a gray mustache. Although deferential in manner, he evidently did not relish the task of piloting this politician before his troops. He gave his orders in a rasping voice and scowled.

Lartal repeated the order, as did the other officers, and the long blades of the sabers brought a sharp streak of light before each dusky, brutal face.

Governor Dufaure cast a casual glance at the riders, nodded and listened with visible impatience to some explanation or other offered him by Corbinot. Then the signal to break ranks was given and the ceremony was over.

"That man—he is chief of all Frenchmen here," said a black private close to Lartal.

"Whee-ey!" replied another.

According to pronunciation and emphasis the exclamation might mean many things. But the man's meaning was clear. He did not approve of the civilian who was "chief of all Frenchmen."

Later Lartal was introduced to Dufaure. The governor pressed his hand mechanically and was about to allow him to pass when one of his aides, a captain, murmured in his ear.

"Very well, very well," Dufaure said audibly. Then he addressed Lartal. "I am very glad to shake the hand of Captain Lartal, the man who saved the Ruault detachment and who defended Bir Ella Ma. Count on me not to forget you, Captain."

Lartal bowed and passed on.

Later Fontarge joined him in his room, where Lartal had gone to doff the tight uniform weighed down with braid and epaulettes.

"What do you think of him, Fontarge."

"The same as you."

"Which is bad enough."

"I stopped to speak to a lieutenant I used to know—traveled with him on his first trip down here. He's on Dufaure's staff and hates the job. He tells me, confidentially of course, that Dufaure has come here to pick a quarrel with Corbinot and to slide him overboard."

"But," Lartal protested, "Corbinot saved Timbuktu. And right now he's getting a grip on the situation—"

"Nevertheless he's due for the sack. So much so that Dufaure already has his successor picked out—and on the way from the coast."

"Who is he?"

"Didn't have time to learn. Dufaure called my friend away, just as you'd call a servant. I couldn't stand that sort of treatment."

Lartal shrugged wearily.

"What could you do? If Corbinot goes I lose a good friend, and it may not be so easy to obtain troops for our little trip later in the year. You better reserve your decision about passing up your turn of leave until we know more."

"I'll take a chance. Yesterday evening I broached the subject to one of the lieutenants here who isn't sick enough to get leave on that account. But he's fed up and homesick, with nine months more to pull. He can have my turn." Fontarge struck his chest a resounding blow, "Still solid, and nine months more in the Sudan won't hurt me."

The truth of Fontarge's information was soon made evident. That very evening it became known that Dufaure and Corbinot had disagreed and that Corbinot was leaving, officially at his own request. And new orders were posted up which brought groans of dismay from the officers.

First, the camel company would not go north that year nor at any time during Dufaure's administration. Second, the warlike methods of conquest would give place to propaganda that was expected to bring about peacefully the submission of tribes still outside the French fold. The far outposts of the Sahel would be evacuated, left unoccupied. As Dufaure put it, the thought would replace the sword.

To avoid unpleasant incidents and to assure natives of the determination of the French to progress by peaceful means alone, all the troops in the northern Sudan would go no farther than ten kilometers from their garrison sites. Along the Niger River the limit was set at ten miles from the northern bank. Recruiting of black soldiers would be halted. The discharged men would not be replaced.

Governor Dufaure declared that the era of blood was over, that the rights of humanity would triumph in the Sudan, as elsewhere.

MAJOR DELAURIER came to Lartal's quarters and exploded. He had listened to the conversation between his chief and the governor, and was stifling with indignation.

"Peace—peace! He has nothing in his mouth but peace! Corbinot pointed out to him that, although the tribes near Timbuktu who have felt our strength would remain quiet, the dissidents would grow bolder. The raiders from Morocco would not halt operations. Under the new rules we could not protect the tribes we have sworn to protect by treaty."

"What did his Excellency have to say, then?" Lartal asked.

"That the Spahis could act as a police force and should be able to handle the situation without difficulty. Corbinot wanted to know how a few men such as the depleted squadrons will have could cope against the large bands of raiders. Then Dufaure had the occasion to spring what he wanted. He told Corbinot that if he could not see his way clear to cooperate, he could find an officer that would. Corbinot, naturally, is going. But he's had his revenge. He asked, before us all,

if Dufaure would go forth to preach his gospel of peace among the Tuareg, without escort. Dufaure does not claim to be brave, but that was rubbing it in. He had the opportunity to do something worthy, offer to go in person, as Corbinot suggested."

"The first group of warriors he spoke to in that fashion would kill him out of sheer disgust," Fontarge remarked.

"He won't chance it." Then Delaurier laid a hand on Lartal's shoulder. "No mixed column for you to command when Moktar el Khiani comes down."

"What ails him anyway?" Lartal wondered, trying to hide his disappointment. "Doesn't he know that peaceful methods in a conquest are utterly impossible? You can't take a man's independence away from him with kind words. If colonial wars are criminal in his opinion, why doesn't he work at home to end them?"

"Dufaure does not care how many men are killed out here," Delaurier stated. "He wishes to be able to go home and satisfy the sentimentalists who want the commercial advantages of colonies without the unpleasant preliminaries. His rôle is that of the man of peace, Without offending the party that's backing him, he'll make himself popular with the Socialists, who hate the very name of Sudan as being equivalent to bloodshed. After he has won his popularity he'll enter politics in France. Then the interrupted task will be resumed here—and cost more lives, because the natives will mistake our leniency for weakness."

"He should be executed!" Fontarge said heartedly.

"Preaching peace to the Tuareg and the Moors! They who have for a proverb: 'That hand that thou cans't not cut off, kiss.' We'll have to beat them all over again, one tribe after another, after Dufaure bundles up his fine speeches and goes home."

"In the meanwhile our hands are shackled," Lartal said with disgust. "Two or three years may elapse before the government awakes to Dufaure's game. We will never be granted again such an opportunity to halt Moktar."

"There's always hope," Delaurier tried to console. "Perhaps, after getting rid of Corbinot, whose popularity may have made him jealous, Dufaure may go back to a saner policy, a system more in keeping with this country and the people we have to deal with."

"A slender hope," Lartal replied. "In four months, five at the most, it will be too late. Next season Tissek, the man I have spoken about to you, Major, may have died, or changed his mind, or again be out of my reach somewhere in the Sahara."

BETWEEN the slats of the wooden blinds the sun pierced with fast-diminishing strength. The prolonged call to the last afternoon prayer seemed the voice of the vibrating heat.

"Allah—Allah—"

Lartal glanced toward the cot upon which Fontarge rested. The lieutenant had continued the siesta, had not even stirred at the sound of the bugle at four-thirty. Fontarge counted over two years' stay in the Sudan since his last leave, which had in turn been preceded by an interrupted sojourn of thirty-eight months. When his morale had been shaken by the unfortunate turn that brought Dufaure into power, his physical strength seemed to have abandoned him. A touch of sun, suffered during a short trip to Kabara a week before, had left him nervous and erratic in speech.

Lartal crossed to the cot, shook him by the shoulder gently.

"Get up—it will be time for mess soon and you have to dress."

Fontarge opened his eyes and scowled.

"It's hot," he grumbled.

"Forty-five centigrade in this room," Lartal announced, "but loafing all day won't make you cooler. Samadin got a tub ready for you long ago."

Fontarge rose and followed Samadin, to return a few minutes later wrapped in a dressing gown of creamy silk, and in

a better humor. He dressed leisurely, pausing before the mirror:

"——, what a face! I'm yellow as a canary."

"Bilious," Lartal suggested. "Too much fretting."

Three months had elapsed since Dufaure had issued his orders, as a result of which officers who had occupied smaller posts along the desert fringe had returned to Fort Hugueny, and the quarters were crowded. Every one realized the stupidity of the current handling of affairs and spent the time cursing the governor and praying for a new leader.

Dufaure's policy had marred French prestige in the Sudan. The Moors, Arabs and blacks were simple-souled gentlemen, devoid of the understanding necessary for the perception of subtleties applied to conquest. They thought it natural that the French should come into their lands for commercial profit. The natives had fought the invaders with the means of which they were disposed. Life had not been unpleasant. Fighting was good sport, preferable to herding flocks and tilling the soil.

When the French troops suddenly became inactive the natives stopped hostilities for a few days. They were not averse to a breathing space. And they rather suspected that the soldiers were planning a big stroke, such a stroke as had avenged the massacre at Tacoubao.

Then emissaries began to circulate among them, bringing words of peace, seeking to win them over by a show of generosity, as if they had been conquered. They were expected to believe in kind words and come forward with the head tax, toll tax, pasture tax. The emissaries, chosen by men as new to the Sudan as was the governor, were considered worthless renegades among their own people. The first few vanished. The others concealed themselves near Timbuktu and returned at the end of the month with palms outstretched for their pay.

Encouraged by the passivity of the blue-and-red soldiers, the Kel Antassar Tuareg, who had been near admitting themselves beaten, resumed action. Not only did they operate north of the limit, but they slipped inside, looted establishments of friendly natives, attacked patrols, dropped several negro riders and mutilated them and then retreated into the sure safety of the forbidden zone.

Bands of Taureg from the interior of the Sahara, Ahaggars and others, doubtless had heard of the golden opportunity. The tribes which had already signed peace pacts with France were legitimate prey. Had they not accepted the yoke of the Infidel, and had not the Infidel abandoned them? With the delicacy brought to border warfare by the people of Islam, flocks were captured, herders slain and the young girls carefully separated from wrinkled hags and carried away.

The loyal natives complained to the authorities in Timbuktu, were met with promises. But empty words did not bring back the dead, nor replace flocks or daughters. One by one they abandoned the French.

Lieutenant-Colonel Deligny, who had replaced Corbinot, was shamed into asking the governor for authority to act, although he had accepted the assignment with full knowledge of Dufaure's system. The governor replied that nothing could be done. All a matter of patience. Deligny must be patient.

Lartal and the other officers who had signed treaties in the name of the government were bitterly resentful to be branded as men who made false promises. Chiefs who had trusted in Lartal came to him, related their woes. He could not possibly disavow the French policy before natives and so he had to bear the scornful glances that invariably belied their polite speeches.

Lartal was a soldier by inclination. Yet he did not make a god of military power. He knew that from a strictly Christian viewpoint the conquest of the Sudan was not justified. He was not blinded by high-sounding orations on the spread of civilization and the duty to help weaker peoples. Nevertheless he saw in colonization the enlargement of France and

knew his work to be useful. France was in the Sudan to stay, at least until a more powerful nation should deem the land worth the shedding of blood.

He could not accept the false principles of humanity forced upon the Sudan by Dufaure. It was difficult to sit quietly while the work of many years was being destroyed.

He glanced at Fontarge and was tempted to once more broach the subject.

"What were you doing with Gautier?" he asked instead. He had noticed growing friendship between the lieutenant and the sergeant. That morning they had been talking together animatedly.

"Nothing much. We have a little time on our hands, as you well know, and Gautier suggested that we train some of the noncoms. We have one or two native corporals who are not unintelligent."

"Better than wasting time fuming," Lartal agreed.

He accepted a glass of spirits and smoked. The conversation rolled on the past, both men avoiding references to Moktar el Khiani. Presently some one rapped upon the door. Lartal knew that Delaurier was not within the fort that day, and that Samadin never rapped.

"Come in," he invited.

The door opened and Lieutenant-Colonel Deligny appeared.

Although Corbinot had been known to visit the captain in his rooms, this was the first time Deligny had done so. Lartal and Fontarge rose, saluted. There was a moment of uncertain silence.

"Will you sit down, Colonel?"

Deligny sat down.

"May I offer—" Lartal indicated the bottles.

Deligny nodded and mixed himself a drink. At length he thought to gesture for his officers to sit. And for several minutes he led the conversation on casual topics.

Known in advance as a creature of Dufaure, Deligny had proved a surprize. The captain had expected a fussy, mean-tempered martinet, with little military worth. As a matter of fact Deligny was the typical cavalry officer in speech and physique, broad-shouldered, slim-legged, with kind eyes and grizzled mustache. Several little crosses on orange and black ribbons had been identified as Russian decorations. And somehow it had become known that Deligny, while a very young man, had served the Tzar in Asia. From the Cossacks he had learned a multitude of tricks which he delighted to exhibit. Agile as a stripling, he would mount a horse at a gallop and perform stunts that made the Spahis gasp. Perhaps this was not dignified in a military commander, but Deligny had won the admiration of the blacks, and their adoration.

And Lartal could not bring himself to dislike this man, even though he represented the failure of his plans.

"I—I must apologize for intruding upon you without warning, Captain Lartal," Deligny began, in such a tone that both younger men knew he was broaching the subject he had come there to discuss, "but—I think that certain matters are better settled privately. In reality you are not concerned with what I am to say, Captain. I came to speak to Lieutenant Fontarge."

Lartal rose, as if to leave.

"No, no. You are his friend and will help me to convince him that I am acting for his interest."

Fontarge straightened in his chair and waited.

"I know there is criticism leveled at me in Timbuktu," Deligny went on. "But I also know that it is expressed sincerely. Were I the only one concerned I certainly would not honor gossip with my attention. However, when rumors are reported to me from the governor's cabinet in an official letter I must act."

"What have I done, Colonel?" Fontarge asked steadily.

"No great harm, Fontarge," Deligny assured him. "An error common to your age—you've talked too much."

Lartal moved slightly forward.

"I believe I know the source of the rumors, Colonel. And I am really to blame.

Several months ago, I obtained from your predecessor a transfer to my unit for Lieutenant Fontarge, who was, and still is, my closest friend. Lieutenant Garros, who was displaced, saw in his transfer a reflection upon his own ability, and strangely enough, instead of blaming me, blamed Lieutenant Fontarge. I'm sure that the whole thing has been purposely exaggerated."

"Possibly. That is my belief as well," Deligny replied. "Were you in question, Captain, I would have more liberty to pass over the matter. But, unfortunately, Lieutenant Fontarge has several times been rash in his words, although on other occasions, he addressed himself directly to the man most concerned."

"I am ready to repeat what I have said, Colonel," Fontarge declared, very pale.

"I never doubted your courage, Lieutenant. I knew that you would admit your statements. It seems that you volunteered, in public, that I exhibited certain weakness—let us use the word, cowardice." Deligny's face became serious. "Personally I would be content merely to point out that you know little of me. We are not of the same age. It has been my good fortune to be on the field and I always managed to conceal what timidity is in me."

"Colonel," Fontarge protested, deeply embarrassed, "I never doubted your physical courage."

"Moral courage, then?"

Fontarge's hands trembled imperceptibly.

"Yes, Colonel."

"Why?"

"The situation in Timbuktu is such that—"

Deligny nodded.

"It does not please me. But how am I to blame? I received orders from the ministry to serve under Governor Dufaure. He had been given full power. I obey. I obey as you have obeyed. And, if I have thoughts, I have kept them to myself. You probably are sorry you didn't."

"I am, Colonel," Fontarge admitted. Then, evidently fearing this would be taken for an apology, he added, "I say that not through fear of consequences, but because I realize that I had no right to speak until I knew you. I beg you not to let that admission soften your resolutions, Colonel."

Deligny smiled grimly.

"My first impulse was to pull your ears, Lieutenant. I had received my first wound at the time when you were still suckling. Respect for age even more than respect for rank should have kept you quiet."

"It is difficult to see you and remember your age, Colonel."

Deligny, flattered in spite of his efforts to remain angry, allowed a chuckle to escape him.

"That alone would have assured your forgiveness, had it been dependent on me. I regret that matters are more or less out of my hands."

"So that I am to be punished?"

"Punished—punished—I don't know if that's the right word. You will merely be sent to France, and transferred to a home regiment. And don't worry, Lieutenant, I have not loaded your record down with all this. I once talked too much myself and, having learned better, pity sinners."

"Thank you, Colonel."

"Back home, try to behave."

"When do I leave?"

"In two days. The river steamer will be going upstream then, and there is little use waiting. Pack your trunks and be ready."

"Yes, Colonel."

Deligny rose, twisting his riding whip.

"I'm glad that's done," he breathed. "Sorry, Lartal, to have disturbed you. Fontarge, come to shake hands with me before you leave, do you hear?"

Lartal escorted him to the outer door, then returned to the room.

"Leaving—like this—" Fontarge muttered. "You know I'm half tempted to blow my brains out!"

"Don't talk like a kid—"

"You're here, all my friends are here and I—I'll never come back."

"Not long ago you wanted to go to France—and stay."

"I was just talking in the air. I'll miss my men—some of them I've had five years. I was the first Frenchman they knew. And I liked the life, too."

"After Dufaure is replaced I'll obtain your recall. It may be a year or two, but I'll do it."

Fontarge clutched Lartal's hand desperately.

"I'll take care of your men, don't worry," the captain added.

A few minutes later Fontarge was whistling, and teasing the surly Samadin, who, brush in hand, was polishing his boots. Lartal was accustomed to his friend's rapid changes of mood.

He was completely reassured.

AT FOUR the next afternoon, Lartal left for Kabara, with three men for escort. He had received a note from Captain Bakary, a pressing invitation to join him, as he had matters of importance to discuss.

He found Bakary in uniform; not the whites usually worn by European officers, but the dark blue of the naval infantry, in which, as an officer of *tirailleurs*, Bakary was officially listed. He seemed conscious of the braid on his sleeves and the medals on his chest. There was a certain note of apology in his voice when he spoke.

"About that business we were engaged upon in Timbuktu—I received news of Tissek concerning the man you seek."

"Why didn't you come to me with it?" Lartal asked, puzzled.

"I received precise orders to leave Timbuktu and not to return there. To embark at the earliest possible date to join my new command. I am transferred to Senegal, Captain Lartal. It seems that my work here did not satisfy his Excellency, *Monsieur* Dufaure."

"How did you incur his wrath, Bakary?"

"My reports on general conditions are sent to the governor-general in St. Louis. I have learned that there will be attacks on a large scale, for it has become known that the strength of our forces is less than usual. It was my duty to repeat those things."

"And your reports did not match those sent in by Governor Dufaure?"

"Evidently not, Captain, for I received orders to dismiss all my informers and to report at Goree Island, Dakar, for service there—as infantry instructor!"

"My poor Bakary!"

"Another year and we'll see who was right, Captain Lartal. In the Sudan tribes must feel the reins checking them."

"You and I both know that. Cheer up, Bakary, this will not last forever. But long enough to undo all the plans I have made with Tissek."

"Who knows?" Bakary replied calmly. "More than two months ago, according to Tissek, Moktar el Khiani left his home. Instead of crossing the Rhettamia Dunes, where he feared to encounter some of the Algerian detachments, he crossed the Draa Hammada, where he probably rested at Naijat Well."

"Just a moment," Lartal interrupted. "With all his strength, why should he fear meeting our men?"

"Because his *rezzou** is divided into several parts at the start, leaving at intervals. You see, the water in the wells would not be sufficient for all on the same day, so that they travel two or three days apart and give the water time to trickle in."

Lartal nodded.

"From the Rhettamia Dunes, Moktar passed to the Ouahila. From there, leaving the passage of El Menakeb to his right, he entered the Iguidi Dunes. He camped at Tagvaza or near it, north of Taoudeni. Then he went on to establish himself near Foum-Ellous, the pass through which the salt caravans must travel. After that, we know not what he did, but we know that he should be here within a few days, for he travels very swiftly after having sent back the booty

*Raiding band.

captured near Taoudeni, leaving with him only well-mounted warriors. Tissek will know more and will inform you."

Lartal shrugged.

"What good will all this do me now?"

"Who knows?" Bakary asked again.

Lartal could not resist the temptation to make a rough map on which he noted the route followed by Moktar on his long trip across the Sahara.

When this was concluded night had come. The lieutenant of infantry commanding the guards at Kabara invited him to dinner. At his table Lartal made the acquaintance of Dupic, another lieutenant of infantry, who was leading a section of *tirailleurs* to Bamba, eastward.

Dupic had served a year in Senegal, and before that had won his promotions from the ranks in the Foreign Legion. He was quiet, soft-spoken, appeared much older than his thirty-nine years, his hair being almost white. Lartal in his less serious moments, had roamed in the native quarters of many Algerian garrison towns, as had Dupic. By the time the sixth bottle had been emptied, Dupic was loquacious:

"You've been to El Kadissa? A —— of a hole, the cesspool of Algeria. I was 'disciplined' there for seven months. Ever meet La Ghamila? Sure you must have—"

At ten o'clock Lartal drew his watch.

"I better start."

"You'll get your throat cut."

"Nonsense. I have three men with me."

"Ever since this —— system has been in effect groups of Moors have been prowling about. They'll see you leave—and one man's worth as much as another in the dark."

"I have a friend leaving in the morning, on the *Monge*."

"She won't be going until noon. There's always something happening so that she can't leave at nine. Get up at dawn, and you'll be in time to catch your friend still in bed."

Before the insistence of the officers, Lartal consented to stay. The boy brought other bottles and as the hours passed the stories told grew in length and obscurity. Lartal retired with a whirling head.

EARLY the next morning Lartal departed, followed by his three Spahis. An hour later he was in his room.

Samadin, clad only in a pair of baggy blue trousers, his torso swelling and sinking with each stroke of the broom, was sweeping the floor. In a corner Fontarge's three small trunks were piled, padlocked and ready.

"Lieutenant?" Lartal inquired.

"Lieutenant?" Samadin repeated. "Lieutenant?"

"Yes, where is he?"

"He gone already."

Lartal pointed to the trunks.

"Didn't take them. Why?"

"No savvy, Captain?"

"Didn't he come back here last night?"

"Yes, he come back. Then he go quick."

"Didn't sleep?"

Samadin, who was nothing if not cautious when answering questions, indicated the cot.

"No sleep there, Captain."

Lartal sought for Gautier. In the quarters of the European non-coms, he found five men playing cards.

"Sergeant Gautier?"

"Not here, Captain."

"On duty?"

"No." The speaker hesitated before speaking further, "Hasn't been in bed all night, Captain. We were looking around for him awhile ago when we woke up. Then we decided he was somewhere on his own business. He's not on duty until ten, Captain."

"All right. Thank you."

In the yard Lartal questioned several privates. No one had seen Fontarge, no one had seen Gautier, that morning. At the stables a surprize awaited him. The French sergeant had news of both men.

"Lieutenant Fontarge and Sergeant Gautier went out shortly after midnight, Captain."

"Alone?"

The non-com lifted his brows in bewilderment.

"Why, no. They took sixteen men with them."

"Did you ask them where they were going?"

"I, Captain? Faith, no!"

Lartal pursued his investigation. He learned that Fontarge and Gautier, before leaving, had obtained the reserve cartridges of the squadron. He discovered that the men selected to follow the lieutenant were all veterans, each of whom had served under Fontarge for several years. To do this, Fontarge had disrupted the usual order of things, throwing Lartal's unit into confusion.

"There was Suleyman Seydou, Mahmadi Kamara, Modi Sankare, Birama Diallo," Lartal was informed by one of the native corporals, who had checked off the missing men. He went on down the list naming all of the sixteen.

"Did you ask them where they were going?"

"We did. But Lieutenant Fontarge came himself, spoke to each man. When we who didn't go talked, he said we should shut up."

"They all liked Lieutenant Fontarge, eh?"

"Too much," the negro answered emphatically. "More than father, more than mother."

Lartal hesitated. A suspicion that he dared not formulate had crept into his mind. Perhaps, after all, Major Delaurier had called upon Fontarge for some outside duty. In any case there was no harm in asking him.

Delaurier, surprized by Lartal while running a leaden comb through his gray hair, was not in a good humor.

"What's the matter now, Lartal?"

"Did you send Lieutenant Fontarge on patrol, Major?"

"I? Are you crazy? He leaves this morning."

"He went out with Sergeant Gautier," Lartal explained. "He took with him sixteen men."

Delaurier's face grew red, then purplish.

"What is he up to, do you know?"

"No, Major."

"Has he been ailing of late?"

"No—a bit fed up, perhaps. Touch of fever a week ago."

"Deligny'll have to be told."

"I'll do that immediately."

"Wait—I better come along, Lartal. Now if you don't want him to get into a great deal of trouble, you better make up your mind right now that you noted erratic behavior on his part for several weeks. You understand me, don't you?"

"Perfectly."

"All right, come along." Delaurier crushed a *képi* on his head and led the way to Deligny's quarters.

"What do you think he's up to?" Deligny asked, as Delaurier had a short while before.

"——! If I only knew, Colonel."

"Have you any idea, Lartal?"

"I fear the worse, Colonel, in his actual condition."

Deligny pursed his lips:

"Eh—eh—queer! I suppose he's been under doctor's care?"

"For a touch of sun, a few days ago."

"That'll explain a good many things," Deligny admitted. "Although, just between ourselves, that's rather a hoax. Major, send an orderly after him. Instruct him, in no uncertain terms, to come back immediately."

"That will be done, Colonel."

"When Fontarge receives the order he will have time to reflect. And he probably will return. I don't dare send more men as if to make an arrest. He might do—anything. I know you would wish to go to him, Lartal. But the presence of a superior, even you, might enrage him. Written orders will give him time to think, and to avoid speaking hastily before the privates and before Sergeant Gautier. By the way, what is that bird doing in this affair?"

"Probably believed as the others that Fontarge was acting upon orders," Lartal replied.

"Pretty thoughtless of Fontarge to drag him into it," Deligny decided.

"However, we'll see to that later. How many hours' start have they?"

"Six or seven hours, Colonel."

"A well-mounted man will catch up by nightfall. By noon, tomorrow, we'll have news.

Deligny rose to signify that the interview was ended.

THE rider returned the following day. Lartal hurried to Major Delaurier's office, to be present when the lieutenant's answer was read. Delaurier tore open the envelop given him by the negro private, who explained that it had been placed in his trust by the officer commanding the detachment. Lartal saw his chief scan the lines and knew he was not satisfied.

"That is my order, which he has sent back without comment!" Delaurier smashed his fist down on the table. "He's got five years' prison coming to him. ——, he richly deserves them!"

The casual return of a categorical order by a subaltern to a superior officer was a grave offense that might well lead to a court martial. To seek to palliate such a sin, Lartal would have had to place himself in a precarious position. He reasoned that if his own loyalty was doubted he would be less able to help the lieutenant emerge from his mad escapade. And so he thought best to offer no excuses for Fontarge.

"Thou," Delaurier addressed the messenger, "did the lieutenant tell thee anything by word of mouth?"

"Yes, Major," the black replied impassively. He held himself very straight, Heels joined, little finger on the seam of the trousers, according to regulation. But his face was gray rather than the healthy color resembling ebony. He was patently exhausted from the long ride. "He say, 'When I am ready I come back. Until then, let me alone, all of you.' "

"Did he tell thee to speak thus to me?"

"No, Major—when he spoke, he spoke to me."

Delaurier nodded, drew two five-franc silver coins from the pocket of his wide trousers and gave them to the Spahi.

"Thou hast done very well. Get out, now."

As soon as the negro had passed from the dimmed room into the sunlit yard, Delaurier faced Lartal:

"Fontarge is making monkeys out of us. He told the black what he knew very well would be repeated. But he did not put anything on paper. He is not insane."

"What else can explain his behavior, Major? One does not toss aside years of training and tradition with a light heart."

"When I say he is not mad, that is but a manner of speaking," Delaurier corrected himself. "I mean that he is not affected by any new madness. He always was rather independent. He acts, however, like a man who realizes to the full what he is doing and the probable consequences. A madman would have retorted to my note in like language. A half-madman would have given a vague reason. But a rash man, who has taken the bit in his teeth, would do as he has done. He puts it right up to me to bring this order out at court martial, to bring the negro to attest he read it."

Lartal, with a gesture of helplessness, sank into a chair.

"I feel to blame for this, Major. I asked him to stay—tempted him. And sincerely, he is somewhat mad on the subject of Moktar el Khiani. You see, he was in the yard of Bir Ella Ma that day when Captain de Vallier's head was thrown in. It was gruesome, and I—I don't always care to dwell upon it."

"Um—yes, yes! You have your attenuating circumstances all lined up. Nevertheless, his guilt is certain on several points. Acting without orders, abuse of power, illegal requisition of supplies and ammunition, enticing a non-com to mutiny—for that's what it all amounts to—a mutiny!"

At this point Deligny rode into the yard, dismounted with the grace acquired in the Twenty-Sixth Don Cossacks and, with his light, dancing step, entered the room. Delaurier informed him of the latest developments.

The lieutenant-colonel whirled on Lartal.

"You who know him well—would he resist arms in hand?"

"I believe he would, to tell the truth," Lartal admitted. "He is childish in living up to the merest statement. A few years ago he said he would never touch cards again—and has kept his word."

"And gambling is the strongest of passions," Deligny agreed. He shook his head. "This is a gambler's trick. Gambling on the sympathy of the majority. Do you realize what it would mean for the lieutenant to fire, or even order his men to fire, upon a French group?"

"Treason."

"Degradation—the firing squad. One black private wounded, and his case would be clear." Deligny's face was wrinkled in a grimace of worry, "I've served thirty years, in two armies, but I've never been faced by a problem such as this."

"Let me go to him," Lartal pleaded.

"No!" Deligny lifted his broad shoulders. "Don't you see, if we send you, we can not send you alone. Your trip and your mission will have to be reported. That would burn the bridges behind us, and Fontarge would be tried. Heaven knows, Lartal, that while I believe Fontarge deserving of punishment, I don't want to wreck a man his age, a man with his record. And his disgrace would disgrace the Spahis."

"The question must be settled," Delaurier exclaimed. "One way or the other."

"Lartal, could you appeal to his filial love?"

"I don't believe so. His mother is dead and he has been estranged from his father several years. He is at bottom genuinely cynical concerning the conventional notions of filial duty and family honor."

Deligny addressed the major.

"Put that order away, where it won't be seen. I believe that with a couple of night's reflection Fontarge will come back and cease his escapades before really harming any one. Lartal, have you spoken of this affair?"

"No, Colonel," Lartal hesitated. "Of course, the non-coms and the negroes sense something unusual. But nothing precise is known."

"I will give him ten days—you must admit that is enough. If he comes back without having endangered his men too greatly, I will perjure myself to the extent of saying I sent him. But," Deligny clenched his fist, "when he comes back he will sign his resignation from the army. I despise scandal, but I can not compromise too far with duty."

"I understand that you are being very lenient, Colonel," Lartal replied. "Even I, his friend, would not have done what you are doing. Thank you."

"Thank you—thank you!" Deligny grumbled. "And by the way, don't take it into your head to go to him without my orders. My patience has its limits."

FOR four days no news came of Fontarge. Then, in rapid succession, reports arrived, brought in by natives.

The lieutenant was not doing things half-way.

First came the tale of fighting, eighteen miles north of the limits assigned by Governor Dufaure; that is, nearly thirty miles inland from the Niger River, beyond the bush belt. A *jich** composed of twelve Tuareg from the Central Desert, which was camping quietly near a well after a successful looting tour, was attacked at dawn by the black troopers under Fontarge. The fight did not last long. The Tuareg, surrounded, were hacked down by the big blades of the Spahis before they were fully awake. The booty—sheep, oxen and camels—was returned to the friendly natives from whom it had been taken.

Next, close upon the heels of the first action, was the execution of three Kel Antassars, who had slipped into the French zone and slain a negro soldier a few weeks previously. Fontarge had

*Small raiding party.

ordered that the three culprits, identified by many, be made to kneel with their backs toward the firing squad. The following day a Moorish preacher, who had been busy inciting the quiet tribes to open rebellion, was dragged from a tent in the very center of a large encampment.

The other white man, Sergeant Gautier, had translated Fontarge's words. He said that the preacher had been well treated by the French, having accepted alms from them while in Timbuktu. And that his words were those of a liar. Fontarge, placing the muzzle of a revolver in the man's ear, had indicated to the crowd how that speaker, so brave when it came to risking the lives of others, quivered with fear when his own was at stake. Then he had pressed the trigger. The same afternoon a shepherd who had put poison in the water of a well used by French patrols was decapitated, his head placed on a long pole.

By the end of the week it seemed as if the eighteen men were everywhere at once, striking out of the night like an avenging hand. A group of six Spahis, of the Bamba garrison had encountered Fontarge. And the native corporal in command had been refused admission into the ranks of the valiant band, much to his chagrin.

"Allah!" Lartal murmured, as the lieutenant slid farther and farther on the downward path that led to degradation. "Allah!"

He did not know himself whether this was an oath or a prayer. True, Fontarge might be dismissed from the service, might even be given a term in prison, but what a glorious farewell he was giving his old life! Because of Fontarge, officers who had suffered under the quizzical gaze of natives now straightened up and smiled. Against orders, at the risk of his so-called honor, Fontarge was fulfilling the treaties. And on all sides Lartal heard men, both officers and non-coms, condone and even admire Fontarge and Gautier.

The rumors at last pierced through to the solemn Monsieur Dufaure, upstream in Bamako. Lartal knew that the staff captain who arrived at the fort to see Deligny was bringing instructions. But to his surprize he was not called to share in the conference between the lieutenant-colonel and Major Delaurier. Something was being decided, he felt sure. He approached Delaurier, but the latter would not satisfy his curiosity.

"The less you mix in this, Lartal, the better for you. Governor Dufaure has learned of your friendship with Fontarge and would suspect you of complicity on the slightest pretext. Of course, we all know you and you would not suffer much. But even an official blame makes a blot on one's record."

"My record!" Lartal exploded. "I'd give my stripes to have him back here and out of the governor's scope. I'd sooner be a brave man's friend than a fool's servant."

"See! You bear out my fears," Delaurier was content to point out.

For two more days Lartal waited in uncertainty. He found it difficult to sleep at night, and then even more difficult to arise in the morning. Samadin, who felt it his duty to give advice, was roughly invited to keep his mouth shut. It was in the face of this peremptory order that he awoke Lartal before dawn of the third day following the last conversation with Delaurier.

"Has he come back?" Lartal asked, for his first thought was of Fontarge.

"No, Captain. Another man is going off."

"Ah, and who told thee to awake me?"

Samadin named one of the European sergeants.

"He said not to tell anybody but you that he spoke."

Lartal dressed hurriedly.

"Samadin, pack the saddle-bags. Then go to the stables and saddle Griot. Thou art coming with me, perhaps, so find thy carbine quick."

Samadin grinned.

"Yessah, Captain."

Near the stables Lartal saw a score of Spahis, mounted, carbines slung across their backs. Four Europeans were grouped before the immobile line of horsemen, talking in low voices. Nearer, Lartal recognized Deligny, the major and Lieutenant Garros. The fourth man was a sergeant.

"What are you doing here, Lartal?" Deligny challenged.

"I believe those men are mine," Lartal retorted quietly. "Why are they ordered about without my knowledge? I have not been deprived of my command that I know of."

"This is not your affair, Lartal," Delaurier protested. "We have no wish to force you to act against your friend."

"Do you deprive me of my command, then?"

"Why, no—"

"Dismount!" Lartal called to the Spahis. "Lead your horses back twenty meters, Sergeant." When this order was obeyed, he resumed. "You wish to spare me, evidently. And in doing so you threaten to make matters worse. Lieutenant Garros believes he has cause for personal resentment against Fontarge. Fontarge, on the other hand, does not like him and will resent his being sent to arrest him. The blacks will, in an emergency, obey Fontarge. You will succeed only in bringing about the shedding of blood. It's like touching a match to powder."

Garros drew near Lartal.

"Captain, I assure you I don't derive any pleasure from this."

"You can save yourself annoyance, Garros, by willingly giving place to some one else."

"Readily, Captain."

Delaurier drew the lieutenant-colonel aside and they conferred for several minutes. Lartal heard the names mentioned of other lieutenants present at the fort. He knew what the two older men feared—that the officer they sent would be tempted to join Fontarge.

"Lartal, you have always been the personification of duty," Deligny said. "We have faith in you. You will go out after Lieutenant Fontarge and bring him back here. If possible, without the use of force. If not, we know that friendship will not interfere with your mission."

"Yes, Colonel."

Lartal inspected the men who were to follow him. They were not, on the average, as old in time of service as the men with Fontarge. They had never followed Lartal in active service, while many of them had served with Fontarge. The captain knew the dog-like devotion granted by blacks to their first chief. A difficult task was before him.

"Saddles!" he called.

The gate was opened, and the Spahis filed out silently. From the stables came Samadin, leading Griot and his own horse. Lartal mounted. Delaurier, on foot, escorted him beyond the portals.

"You had your plans all made! Else how did Samadin know?"

"That is true, Major. This job belongs to me."

"Do it well, then. Good luck."

Lartal pressed his knee against Griot's flanks and soon was in the lead. A diffuse light pierced through the cool atmosphere and, in the east, the first flash of the new sun spread.

"Trot!" Lartal called.

The detachment rode toward the red sun that had surged over the horizon.

THE fires had died down to smoldering heaps.

The *Dialiba*, the Niger River, spread in the moonlight until its glittering surface shaded into black far away near the opposite bank. In the distance throbbed a tomtom. Somewhere along the shores of the blacks' Nile, some one had been born, was being married or had died. The message carried by church-bells in a Christian land is brought by the tomtom near the three great rivers.

Lartal reached into the pocket of his coat, brought out several sheets of paper and read them, perhaps for the tenth time, by the light of the nearest fire.

The letter was from Fontarge. That

afternoon he had found it, held in evidence in the split of a seven-foot pole planted across his path:

*My Dear Old Man:*

*I have just learned that you are the fellow who has been chasing me the last couple of days. Had I possessed common sense I should have known you would not allow any one but yourself to arrest me and bring me to punishment, for your conscience has always caused me to wonder.*

*I regret exceedingly that I can not wait for you. In the past fortnight I have had a splendid time; perhaps these days will have been the happiest I have spent on this somber sphere. Everything would have been perfect, had you been with me. You know well what esteem I have for you and must realize how sorry I've been that I had to play a nasty trick upon you. So dirty that I did not have the courage to leave you an explanation.*

*I feel that an explanation would be too late now, and you must judge me by my deeds which, between ourselves, without false modesty, were not ordinary in the least. I have done sufficient work for the Republic to be ornamented with glittering plaques from heels to pate. As you may have discovered yourself, my humble labors have brought the French considerable reputation.*

*I should feel remorse, perhaps, but I do not. The lives I have taken were forfeited to us by the ancient laws that have regulated this land for centuries. Acting on my own, without having to keep sacred those lesser laws that bind us at all turns, I was able to be impressive. I was able to use the personal touch, so highly recommended to us in our negotiations with the natives.*

*I have been, so far, extremely lucky. Aside from an insignificant scratch on one arm, I am in perfect health, which you will be happy to learn. One of my men lost two fingers, bitten off in a close wrestling match with a Moor. Which goes to show that when properly handled, in the style it should be, border warfare need not be murderous for both sides.*

*Now, a bit of advice: You can not catch me. Were I you, I'd go straight back to Timbuktu, report failure and allow some other chap, less sensitive to my welfare, to come around here. You will no more order your men to fire on me than I would fire upon you. And, as I am quite decided to keep free for at least a month longer, I'll invariably escape. You have engaged yourself on a very silly affair, sillier than mine, because to no purpose. I have seen by your actions that you were actually trying to pocket me without firing a shot. But, have I not been your companion at Bir Ella Ma, have I not heard your pet theories? We are like two gentlemen playing upon an infinite chessboard. I have but to withdraw—and where are you? You come, I go elsewhere. Simple, but most annoying. You have interrupted my rest twice, and once I had to leave a luncheon unfinished.*

*So go back, go back. By the way, as one never knows what may happen, if I should be dropped send my trunks home to my father. He will then have the luxury of shedding a few belated tears and be harrowed by remorse as well as shame. At his age, when amusements are limited, a man enjoys almost any emotion that makes him feel alive. I have nothing of great value to give you, save perhaps my photograph, taken in a charming background of painted pillars and ferns, in full uniform.*

*But don't worry. I shall probably come back and stand before a court martial. To still any qualms on your part, I give you my word of honor, if you think I still have honor left me, that I shall do all in my power to come back. I can not set a date as yet, as I have other matters to attend to.*

*By the way, if you have with you any boxes of biscuits, a couple of hams, assorted tinned meats and jams, will you send them to me? Entrust them to the first group of natives coming my way. They will deliver them safely—for they know me to be a man capable of slaying any one for anything. In case you don't see your way clear to aid a man who is outlawed, couldn't you drop a hint to Samadin, who loses things so well, to lose the articles above mentioned where I can find them?*

*Good-by for awhile, Lartal. And I will*

*look forward to the arrival of your successor.*

*—Hector Fontarge, formerly lieutenant in the Second Spahis.*

Lartal laughed. Fontarge could always be counted upon to keep his appetite. He glanced at the bundles of food that Samadin had brought, hesitated, then shook his head.

"No, let him pay for his fun. Putrid butter will perhaps send him back."

For three days he had followed Fontarge. Once, he had beheld glowing in the night far ahead the fires of the rebellious detachment. But when he had arrived Fontarge had vanished. Lartal was at the same time annoyed and pleased to find that his original estimation of Fontarge had been right. The lieutenant had outwitted his chief, played with him, sent him on false trails. Informers, evidently coached by Fontarge, had directed the pursuing group. Lartal had seemed to be in search of phantoms, all within a circle of territory not over forty miles in diameter.

Mistaken by the native chiefs as another avenging detachment, the Spahis under Lartal had been greeted everywhere with enthusiasm. The captain had been compelled to listen to long harangues from white-bearded chieftains who poured in his ears their love for the French and their particular worship of Fontarge.

Seated by the fire, as he had sat on a hundred other nights before a hundred such fires, he now faced a conflict that he had never known before. He had a duty to perform, and between himself and that duty there was friendship.

He rose abruptly and sought Sergeant Werder, who had accompanied him. Werder was a stolid Alsatian, deserter from the German army, with many years of service behind him. Big and strong, he replaced intelligence with obedience. If he had noticed that Lartal was not over-eager to bring actual contact between the two detachments, he had given no evidence of the fact.

"I can trust you, Werder, can't I?"

"Yes, Captain."

"I'm going to do something that is not altogether regular, Werder."

"Yes, Captain."

"You know that Lieutenant Fontarge is my friend."

"I do, Captain."

"As I have no opportunity to approach him with my men at my heels, I'll go alone. I may be able to reason with him. And I want to help him."

"That's natural."

"If I go at night he'll get away at the first sound, not knowing that I am alone. I'll start early tomorrow morning. I'd like you to keep the detachment busy, going here and there, so there will be no report of inactivity. But be back at this spot in mid-afternoon. In case any one comes for me, from Timbuktu or elsewhere, and finds me gone, don't try to cover me, for that would only get you into trouble."

"Understood, Captain."

"Lieutenant Fontarge, I have reason to believe, is due north, not more than fifteen miles away from here. I'm going to sleep now. Wake me up at dawn."

"Yes, Captain."

Punctually, Werder awoke Lartal.

Samadin had already saddled Griot, and was himself ready to start. Less phlegmatic than Werder, possibly more devoted to his chief, he protested against being left behind. Only after much grumbling did he surrender to the inevitable.

At the season of the year, a few months following the rains, the north bank of the Niger was thickly overgrown with high grass. But the trails were well defined, and Lartal had no difficulty finding his way. In less than an hour, he left the thick vegetation behind him and Griot trotted on hard soil, tufted here and there with close clumps of bushes. Soon Lartal saw traces of Fontarge's passage and had but to follow these tracks.

When he sensed that he was near the end of his brief journey, he checked his pace and proceeded cautiously. He knew

that the lieutenant was well guarded. His eyes sought for the first glimpse of red that would indicate a Spahi. Yet he saw nothing until a bullet creased the ground ahead of his horse, while a call to halt resounded not far away on his left.

He turned, and recognized a man he knew well, Suleyman Seydou. Seydou wore no coat or headgear. His blue trousers were held up by a belt. Across his naked trunk he had slung a bandolier, doubtless taken from a dead foe. Lartal, who remembered Seydou as a calm, obedient man, greeted him casually and advanced toward him. Seydou shouldered his carbine resolutely.

"Stay!"

Lartal hesitated. It was not to his taste to obey an order from one of his privates. But it would have been more absurd to risk a bullet.

"I have come all alone, Seydou. I wish to talk to thy lieutenant. Call him."

Without changing his position, Seydou called. Another man appeared, whom Lartal also recognized. He listened to the abuse showered upon him by his captain, passively, then said he would inform Fontarge of his presence. He was back in a few minutes and asked Lartal to dismount and follow him, leaving saber and revolver with his horse.

"But wait until I have you both where I want you," Lartal grumbled as he obeyed.

A few hundred yards away the camp was cunningly concealed in a fo d of soil. No tents had been erected, and the attire of the soldiers revealed all too plainly that they had assumed the habits of an independent raiding party, rather than the discipline of French soldiers. Nevertheless they rose as Lartal passed, and saluted.

Fontarge, his uniform dilapidated, his red beard bristling, came to meet his chief with a broad grin on his face, hand outstretched.

"Forgot my razors," he explained.

Lartal refused to shake hands and sat down.

"You're coming back with me and end this comedy once and for all," he said sternly.

"No, I'm not. Got a cigaret?"

Lartal offered a package, and Fontarge smoked after a groan of satisfaction.

"You are aware, probably, that you have five years of prison hanging at the end of your nose?"

"Quite. Also degradation, if all the charges are pushed."

"And your sixteen blacks will all be punished."

"Why? You know yourself they will not be. They obeyed my orders. Don't talk nonsense."

"I grant you that the blacks may not suffer. But what of Gautier? He is not commissioned, therefore he will be sent to the Public Works in Algeria. From there he will be sent to spend the balance of his enlistment in the penal companies, after five or ten years of hard labor."

Fontarge smiled.

"Gautier will be left alone. I lied to him, told him that I had orders from Deligny. As you see, I sent him off so that you would have no chance to converse with him and inform him of the true state of affairs."

"Do you expect me to believe that? Hasn't he noticed anything?"

"I don't expect you to believe it. But a court martial does not condemn on presumption. I'll swear he knew nothing. In reality I have always kept up the pretense with Gautier. He will be able to swear truthfully. Like yourself, he could use his judgment and presume. But he does not know. And I am his superior. They may reduce him and place him in the clink for thirty days. In the meanwhile he's had enough fun to last him a lifetime. Gathered experience, and all that sort of thing."

Lartal nodded.

"Once more, you're probably right. What Governor Dufaure will be after is your head, figuratively speaking of course. Perhaps if you come back now matters can still be arranged."

"I tell you right now I'm only too glad to submit to a court martial. There's

something rotten going on in the Sudan—that peace policy, which threatens to spoil all our work. When there's a boil or an abscess on a human body, one must have it lanced. Well, I'm lancing the actual situation. I will be court-martialed by officers. All men who wear a sword have been against the new policy. Governor Dufaure, that little swine, will realize this before the trial has gone very far. I'll be sent to St. Louis. Newspapers there, lawyers. Result—scandal, investigation. Opposition papers clamor for my punishment. Conservative press gravely probes the affair. Officers all over France interested. After a little more fuss on African soil, I'm transferred to France. I explain my reasons. Experts called in, witnesses."

"Then what?"

"Colonel Corbinot, the hero of the Sudan, is in Paris now. Colonel Corbinot, Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor, testifies—

"'*Monsieur le Colonel*, what do you think of matters in the Sudan?'

"Corbinot is an orator when allowed to swear. Other witnesses bear him out. Who opposes him and why? A meager handful of civilians who total less years than Corbinot in Africa. Captain Bakary called. Socialist press muzzled by the appearance of Bakary's sooty mug. France's army the oppressor of weaker races when it admits a negro to the rank of captain? Gradually Governor Dufaure sinks lower and lower and finally vanishes. My sole fear is that he will realize all this may happen and forgive me."

Lartal looked at Fontarge in amazement. He could not help but see a certain logic in his words.

"No matter what happens," Fontarge went on, "I'll have the consolation of having tried to end a rotten system that everybody despised in silence."

"And you are quite resolved to carry it through?"

"Quite."

"Suppose I were to do my duty to the full and try to arrest you by force?"

Fontarge shrugged:

"Why make a lamentable show of yourself? You know that I have not undertaken this without thought and that nothing will stop me. As for attempting to corner me, give it up. I'll keep running. In a few days, anyway, I'll trot into Timbuktu. So why spoil things now?"

Lartal rose.

"That is your last word?" he asked nervously.

"My last word."

"Then, good-by—" Lartal offered his hand— "Good by, you —— fool!"

He saw clearly that Fontarge, in spite of his bold front, was more moved than he cared to show. He himself could not restrain a certain quaver in his voice.

"One word of warning, Fontarge," he added as an afterthought. "Moktar is not far away. But as he has probably heard of your presence, he will take enough men with him to leave you no advantage. A dead man can not face court martial and do all the pretty things you intend to do."

"Pure logic, as always, from your lips," Fontarge admitted dryly. "You will forgive me, Captain, if I do not escort you outside my camp? You're such a sullen ass that you may still be willing to arrest me if given the chance."

Lartal cut him short with an impatient gesture and followed the black who had before conducted him to Fontarge. He turned impulsively to wave to Fontarge. A strange contraction in his chest annoyed him. He had not felt so helpless and near tears since boyhood.

Suleyman Seydou surrendered Griot to him and stepped back, presented arms. And Lartal rode off.

He hoped that Fontarge was correct in his reasoning. He strove to recall parallel cases. When and under what circumstances was a soldier permitted to disobey orders for his own ideal of honor?

There had been Colonel de Sainte-Église, who refused Dupont's order to surrender, during the Peninsula Wars, and was approved by Napoleon for his act. Sixty years later, Colonel Pean, of

the Grenadier regiment, had burned his flag against Marshal Bazaine's orders, when Metz surrendered to the Prussians. Captain de Negrier, believing that an order contrary to the honor of his army did not bind him, had broken through the German lines, alone—and in full uniform. These men had been upheld by courts martial.

Yet old ideals were dwindling. Many considered an officer as a sort of salaried employee of the government, who had no reason to act independently or follow a special code. For living in the past and believing in standards perhaps forgotten, Fontarge might pay dearly.

"Just the same," Lartal thought, "I'm not sorry to call myself his friend!"

He had again entered the tall grass and was half-way to the assigned meeting place with Werder when he heard hoof-beats approaching. For a moment he weighed in his mind the right he had to risk his life. He felt inclined to stay on the path and meet whoever was coming. Then caution won out and he concealed himself behind a row of bushes through which he could see the trail.

A rider appeared, a negro youth seventeen or eighteen, mounted on a fine horse of local breed. He had no weapon, save a pistol of ancient model, passed through a sash.

"Driven off by a black boy," Lartal muttered. "I seem to pile one stupid action on another."

A FEW minutes after Lartal's departure Fontarge lifted a metal whistle to his lips and blew three piercing blasts. Then he sat down and moodily consumed the slices of roast mutton laid on a tin plate, washed down with brackish water from the near-by well.

Presently Sergeant Gautier appeared and upon a gesture of invitation sat down beside his chief. Like Fontarge, Gautier had allowed his beard to grow. Like Fontarge, he exhibited a ragged uniform. The white coat was left open, showing the scarlet vest studded with tarnished brass buttons.

"I proceeded as far as you ordered me to, Lieutenant," Gautier explained, as if reporting the result of a patrol, "and I saw nothing of interest. I returned immediately upon hearing your whistle."

Very gravely, keeping up the pretense they had begun in Timbuktu, Fontarge nodded.

"I had a visitor while you were gone, Sergeant. Captain Lartal."

Gautier did not try to refrain a smile.

"Anything important, Lieutenant?"

"No, not particularly. We discussed my future course of action, and he brought me the advice of Colonel Deligny."

"And is the colonel pleased?"

"He would be indeed hard to please, if he were not, Sergeant. We have done worthy work, you and I."

"I feared that Captain Lartal had come to recall us."

"In a way, he did. But when I explained matters, he agreed with me that a few days longer would do no harm." Fontarge carefully divided the package of cigarets given him by Lartal, "Your share, Gautier."

"Lucky thing. I can't get used to that stuff in leaves that the natives sell us."

"I should have arranged to obtain supplies in Bamba, Sergeant. But as you remember our departure was decided upon suddenly. Never mind. In a few days the government will again supply us with tobacco rations."

The sun was growing hotter. The two passed into the rectangular shadow of the canvas shelter which the orderlies had erected. The native troopers were stretched upon their blankets, heads sheltered by the saddle-cloth stretched on crossed sticks. They hailed one another and shouted their conversations. Through the uproar of their voices pierced the mournful creaking of the pulley-wheel rigged up over the mouth of the well to facilitate the drawing of water to the surface.

"When do we move on?" Gautier asked.

"Late this afternoon. Our beasts need a rest and we can't very well surprize those sheep-stealers in broad daylight."

Fontarge wiped his forehead. "Cartridges running out?"

"No. We still have enough left for a few days."

The non-com embraced his knees with his arms and was silent.

"Musing?" Fontarge questioned.

"No, admiring." Gautier indicated a group of privates who had risen and were going aside to seek a quiet place for prayer. They knelt, lifted their arms high, knelt again, over and over again. "Good thing that, a sort of Swedish gymnastic."

Fontarge smiled.

"Aside from the physical value, there's the moral value. You and I, we might profit by a little bending of the knees."

"Our—our faith—" Gautier murmured.

Fontarge waved his hand casually:

"Yes, our faith—it fits ill in this land. Christianity is not militant, or should not be, to be correct. But a follower of the Prophet is quite at home in battle."

"Yet the word Islam means Peace."

"I guess we all have to distort our minds a bit, Gautier, to fit interest with ideal."

Gautier held up his hand.

"Some one is coming—I hear Seydou's harmonious bellow."

Without orders, some of the Spahis hurriedly packed their belongings, while others were bringing the horses forward. They acted in silence, and very quickly. Then a hail from Seydou halted the sudden activity.

A young negro rode toward the two white men. A few yards away he dismounted, tapped his horse on the rump, evidently a signal for the animal to remain quiet, and stepped forward, saluting in the Arab manner.

"Sidi Lartal has gone?" he asked.

"Yes. What dost thou desire of him?" Fontarge questioned in Dioula.

"I have words for him from my master."

"Thy master? Who is thy master, lad?"

"Biska ag Tissek, servant of Mohammed el Saleh ben el Fassi."

Fontarge stepped forward trembling with eagerness and grasped the negro by the arm. Lartal had told him, long ago, that Tissek would send him information concerning Moktar.

"What tidings?" he pressed. "Speak!"

The black unslung a powder-horn which he carried over one shoulder and pulled out the wooden stopper at the large end.

"I know thee, Lieutenant. Thou art his friend, for Samadin has told me you lived in one house. I may therefore show thee."

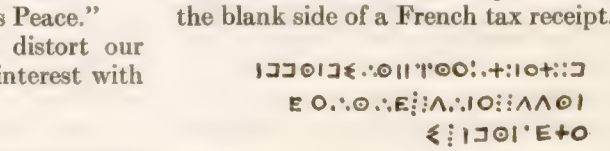
He brought out of the dark dust a small piece of paper, rolled into a thin cylinder. This he handed to Fontarge.

"Signs on it and not Arabic letters," the lieutenant grumbled. He turned to the messenger, "Ask my men for something to eat and food for thy horse."

After the boy had left he again examined the script.

"Tiffinar, I guess."

Sergeant Gautier had taken the script in his turn. It was neatly written, on the blank side of a French tax receipt.



"That is Tiffinar all right, Lieutenant," Gautier said.

"Can you read it?"

"I should be able to. I know Riffi Berber well, and there is a certain analogy between that dialect and Tuareg."

They turned back to the shelter, where Gautier spread the small paper before him and set to work with a pencil, painstakingly translating the strange characters upon a leaf of his military note-book. Fontarge, bending near, hands on knees, waited tensely.

"Well?" he asked, when the non-com glanced up.

"The first ten characters of the first line mean 'Moktar el Khiani,' or at least '*Moktar n'tikkeras*,' Moktar the clever, which is a fairly accurate translation of the Arabic *el khiani*. The next two characters mean 'leave.' Follows three characters making a word which may be

transcribed *asekaye* or *esakaye*. That word I can not identify. Next two signs mean 'water.' The last word of the first line means, I believe, 'brackish.' 'Moktar el Khiani leaving'—then the word I can not translate— 'bad water.' "

"The word missing is obviously the equivalent of 'because,' " Fontarge put in impatiently. "Moktar el Khiani is leaving because of bad water."

"The second line I can comprehend fully," Gautier went on. "The words are well spaced—'thence to me third night.' The third and last line says, 'At Well of God.' "

Fontarge took a pencil and on a clean sheet wrote:

*Moktar el Khiani leaving because of bad water, thence to me on the third night, at the Well of God.*

"Anything important, Lieutenant?" Gautier asked.

"Important?" Fontarge laughed softly. "It depends on the viewpoint, my lad."

Briefly he told Gautier of Bakary's discovery of Tissek, and the agreement made with the caravan leader.

"This is the message to Lartal informing him that Moktar is here. Each year he leaves most of his followers at El Maleka where there is water and pasture and comes to Bir El Abiddin with a few men and pack-camels to take back the goods paid as tribute. Evidently he has changed his plans because of bad water at Bir El Abiddin and is going instead to the Well of God, on the third night. Let's see—third night—unless the man sent by Moktar to Tissek had wings, he took a couple of days. This black sent to Lartal consumed another day. The assigned time may be tomorrow night. We have time to act."

"Have we enough men, Lieutenant?" Gautier asked cautiously.

"We'll find out soon enough if we have not! But with eighteen men and the advantage of surprize, I'd attack even if Moktar had fifty men, which is unlikely."

Gautier was beginning to share Fontarge's excitement as the possibilities of the plan grew upon him.

"How will we know Moktar?"

"They claim one can spot him as the leader anywhere. I know for a fact he mounts a great camel, seven foot high at the shoulder, grayish in color."

"If we succeed, Lieutenant!"

"Before congratulating ourselves, we must locate him."

Gautier brought the lieutenant's map-case, unfolded the charts.

"The Well of God. God — Allah. Lieutenant, I don't see it here."

Fontarge bent over the maps and was no more successful than his second.

"Yet the place is somewhere around here, Gautier. Each one of those holes had half a dozen names. What a fool I was not to correct this map from Lartal's sketches!"

"Another Targui expression meaning 'Well of the Lord' would be '*Anon es Messiner.*' " Gautier paused to jot down several signs on his pad, shook his head. "No, the paper uses *Amanchaye*, 'He Who Sees,' not the actual word for 'God.' Perhaps the same use of a synonym is employed in Arabic. Oh, here is a well marked *El Karim*, 'The Merciful,' often employed instead of Allah."

"Let's see—where is it?"

"Here we are at El Hadji. It's forty, fifty—between fifty and sixty kilometers north of this place."

"The Well of the Merciful is the only well that might mean the Well of God?"

"Yes, Lieutenant."

Fontarge rubbed his hair with a gesture usual to him when he was perturbed.

"I wish Captain Lartal were with us. There's no use asking him—orders are sacred to him. You know, he would give anything to do this himself. He has planned this for months—we're using his work." He strode about nervously, then came back to Gautier. "Heaven knows, his men would be useful. We are too few to risk dividing, and yet a group should be detailed to cut off retreat."

"Why not write Captain Lartal?"

"This is not the time to lessen my force by so much as one man, even to send a messenger. And yet, Lartal should be warned. He warned me."

"You have a man right under your hand, Lieutenant. Tissek's negro boy. Send the message to the captain, together with a letter outlining our plans. In that way you are acting with perfect loyalty."

Fontarge with swift decision accepted the suggestion.

He wrote to Lartal, enclosing the message and the translation by Gautier. Calling the young black, he presented him with the last of his silver coins and asked him to deliver the sealed envelope to Captain Lartal.

After the negro had left, Fontarge ordered the men to fold up the shelter and prepare to leave. When everything was in readiness he brought the metal whistle to his lips again. In answer, the sixteen blacks gathered around him.

"Boys," he said, "I have not scolded you for discarding your uniforms the last three or four days. However, we are now going to fight men—real men. I want them to see that you are soldiers of the white men, not naked bushmen." He raised his hand to still a murmur of protest and pointed at Suleyman Seydou who, possibly more than any other, had been sulky and independent. "As for thee, be quiet, or I shall teach thee manners!"

For an instant Seydou held his glance, then lowered his eyes and stepped back.

"Coats, helmets and belts, do you hear? Then in the saddle."

ON SECOND thought, Lartal felt that he had acted right toward no one. He had not joined Fontarge openly, and yet had not obeyed Deligny's orders as he himself would have expected orders to be obeyed. And he had solicited the mission, prevented a man certain to do his duty from being sent. Hesitation, a new emotion to him, had made him weak, vacillating before Fontarge.

His strict duty was to lead the detachment against the rebels, give the customary challenges and, if they were not complied with, carry out his orders by force of arms. Strive as he would he could not bring himself to contemplate such a course. If any man caused bloodshed it would not be he.

Under those conditions there was but one way out—to go directly to Deligny and confess his weakness, to allow them to send out a man who would not be halted by fear and consideration that have no part in an officer's make-up.

But if he should take the detachment of Spahis back to Timbuktu by land he would give Fontarge the week he had asked for. At present he was comparatively near the post of Bamba, on the Niger River. At Bamba he could leave his men and horses, take the steam-launch left always at the commander's disposal and proceed upstream to Kabara, one hour's ride from Timbuktu. A few minutes given to explanation, and a replacement officer would leave Timbuktu. At Bamba he would find riders and mounts rested, ready to resume the search for Fontarge.

Lartal now perceived how easy it had been for an impulsive man such as Fontarge to forget regulations and obey only his own wishes. He, whose mind was more rigid, whose ideals were more in keeping with the binding frame of discipline, had compromised with strict duty. He had consulted privately with Fontarge, whom he had orders to arrest without question. He placed himself in a position where he depended on a noncom's discretion. A mere report of what had occurred, and he would be exposed to court-martial.

His irritation increased when he reached the spot where his detachment had camped the preceding night. Werder had not yet appeared, was probably fagging the men out in meaningless maneuvers in the tall grass zone. Lartal dismounted, tied his horse to a tree and waited.

Around him native women and children

roamed, come from the near-by villages to pick up what the Spahis had abandoned—a strap buckle, an empty cartridge. The small boys, with the open admiration of their race, clustered near him, standing, however at a respectful distance. Audibly they counted his brass buttons, commented on the spurs and stripes. Lartal was unfortunate enough to smile, and instantly he was beset by the yelling swarm, begging for copper coins. He felt intensely ridiculous as he walked from place to place pursued by the howling youngsters.

The hours dragged, unbelievably long, and Werder did not come. In desperation the captain went to the river bank, to watch a small fleet of canoe-men gathering fish out of the permanent reed nets erected in the stream. For a few francs one of the fishermen loaned him a musket, and the captain sniped at crocodiles sprawling upon near-by sand banks. His skill with the ancient weapon was regarded with wonder by the natives. And when he presented them with the carcasses, his popularity grew. Slices of crocodile tails, properly spiced, were not to be despised as an addition to their diet. Through professional habit, Lartal established friendly relations with the fishermen, conversed with them. Proudly they exhibited the great speed with which they could propel their canoes by means of a pole. They even promised him that, should the *Souraka** come, they would whisk him away to safety.

At four in the afternoon white helmets were seen cresting the gray-green masses of foliage, and a moment later Werder and the Spahis came into full view. Lartal immediately went forward to meet them, with an impatient reproof on his lips, which he stilled when he saw Werder's obvious satisfaction with himself.

"Well, what sort of a day did you have, Werder?"

"Not bad. I shot two antelopes which will seriously better the fare for a while."

"Good. Allow the men to dismount and rest. Then we're going toward Bamba."

*The Moors.

"Bamba, Captain? All right."

Werder transmitted the order.

Lartal saw that his trip that morning and the peculiar behavior of the detachment during his absence had been noticed. His men stared at him, seemed to have questions to ask.

"What is it?" the captain encouraged one of them.

"My brother—same father, same mother, Captain—he is with the lieutenant. Didst thou see him? Is he well?"

By a simple process of elimination they had guessed his errand. There were not a dozen places where a white man would go alone in the region. The fact that they knew dispelled all hope of secrecy. When they returned to the fort, they would speak to the orderlies, the orderlies to their masters. And the news would reach Delaurier or Deligny. Whichever way he turned, he sunk deeper. He was so far compromised that for a moment he was tempted to join Fontarge.

"I saw thy brother," he said, scorning to evade the question. "He is well."

"And what of Fofana? Of Sissoko?" asked others.

Lartal answered their questions.

"We talk to the people around here," one of the privates volunteered. "They say thus, 'The men with the lieutenant eat much—whole lambs, whole oxen, chickens, milk that they take from the bandits. Their chief lets them take what they will also in garments and ornaments from the dead. Is that so, Captain?"

"That I did not see, boys."

"Will we, too, go and fight like them?"

"Perhaps, later."

This guarded assent brought great rejoicing. The tales narrated to them of their comrades' valor, of their sudden wealth and independence, had reawakened the instinct for pillage in these sons of black conquerors. In the brief operations of the past few days he had felt them watching him, and had seen plainly that they realized he was a good leader. They knew well that had he decided to fight, he could have joined and beaten the

other detachment, which several times had been placed in a position that would have been precarious in genuine warfare. Now they believed the tales told of the captain by the *tirailleurs* who had come back from Araouan and had seen Lartal in action. He knew he had but a word to say and they would follow him on any course he might choose.

Werder joined him now, having personally overseen the care given to Griot. He brought with him a young negro.

"This man was here to see you soon after you left, Captain. You said that any one asking for you should be told where you had gone. I told him and he followed after you. Lieutenant Fontarge sent him back."

Lartal recognized the young black he had avoided on the trail.

"What is thy name, lad?" he questioned.

"Nymaya, Captain."

"Dost thou come from Biska ag Tissek?"

"Yes, Captain," Nymaya answered, speaking to Lartal in Arabic. "The other white chief sent me back to thee. But I became lost, for I believed thee to have joined all the other soldiers, which I followed here after going far to find thee."

He drew out an envelop which he gave Lartal. The captain recognized Fontarge's writing.

"This is not from Tissek."

"I gave what I brought from Tissek to the other white chief. It is inside the glued paper, Captain."

The promised message from Tissek! He smiled with some bitterness when he realized how elated he would have been had Dufaure not issued his strict orders against armed conflict.

Lartal tore open the envelop and read Fontarge's letter.

*Dear Old One:*

*Some minutes after you left, the bearer came to me. Gautier, who is not as foolish as his behavior would indicate, managed to translate Tissek's note. I enclose a copy of his translation, also the original. I can not express how it grieves me to sneak one over on you, but I simply can not resist the opportunity. I am going to El Karim and have it out with the old fox. If all goes well, expect my sprightly appearance in Timbuktu soon, with the Beraber chief tied to my chariot's wheels. If not, I have nothing to request —no flowers, no wreaths! There's a third possibility, that I'll fail altogether to see him, but I have a hunch to the contrary. I take for granted that you wish me luck. Gautier thanks you for the cigarets.* —*Fontarge.*

Lartal had heard, from others in Timbuktu, that Gautier was considered accurate in his translations. And so he glanced casually at the message from Tissek. But he read carefully the words in Fontarge's handwriting:

*Moktar el Khiani leaving because of bad water, thence to me on the third night, at the Well of God.*

According to the message Moktar had changed his meeting place with Tissek from The Well of the Slaves to El Karim, the Well of the Merciful or the Well of God. Fontarge was going to El Karim—

Lartal crushed the letter in his hand; then with a gesture of helplessness placed it in his pocket. He knew the futility of dispatching orders forbidding the move. Something akin to resentment crept into him. Fontarge was stealing his work!

"Come on, Werder, get a move on," he called.

He rode beside the sergeant, and explained his intentions.

"We have nearly two hours of light left. We can make the bend in the river opposite the island, you know, before darkness settles down completely. From there to Bamba is a very short ride, which we can cover in the morning. This is Tuesday, therefore it is tomorrow that the steam-launch leaves Bamba for Timbuktu. I'm going on that boat. You'll wait in Bamba until an officer comes to take my place."

"Yes, Captain," Werder said, without exhibiting curiosity.

"Did you ever hear of Moktar el Khiani, Werder?"

"Yes, Captain."

"I think Lieutenant Fontarge is going after him."

"Good thing if he can get him, Captain."

"Should we go and help, Werder?"

Werder took the pipe from his lips and glanced quickly at the captain.

"That's up to you, Captain. But we won't. When a man's really tempted to do a thing he does it and don't bother asking whether it's right or wrong from people who don't know more than he does."

"Is that so, Werder?"

"Yes, Captain. When I decided to leave the German army, I was gone the next day."

Lartal envied this nerveless system, free from the mental torture that wracked him and his kind.

There was still a vestige of light in the sky when the elongated shadows of the troopers stretched out on the crescent of sandy beach from which the island above Bamba could be seen. Lartal had no desire to reach the post that evening, as he was unwilling to go into long explanations to the officers there to make clear his reasons for returning to Timbuktu. In the morning he would arrive, and leave again while the routine duties of the day occupied the white men.

Lartal had already removed his boots and was about to throw himself on the cot made ready by Samadin, when Nymaya drew near.

"It would have been better to go by another road I know of, Captain," he offered.

"Go where?"

"To El Abiddin. My master told me to lead thee, and that is why I dare speak, although thy servant may beat me."

Samadin, who had very definite prejudices against a black of mixed ancestry such as Nymaya seemed to be, had indeed been threatening the lad. Lartal turned and warned him.

It had occurred to him that Fontarge had mentioned El Karim as the place where he hoped to find Moktar, that the translation of the message by Gautier bore out that belief. But Nymaya, direct from Tissek, clearly stated that he was to lead Lartal to El Abiddin.

He ordered Samadin to bring a lantern. From his pocket he produced the message from Tissek. While with the Algerian Meharists, he had whiled away the long evenings studying Tiffinar, tutored by a Chambaa non-com who passed as an expert. He set to work now to "decode" the script.

The first twelve characters on the first line he translated easily:

"Moktar, the Clever, leave—" Then he paused, puzzled. "Where did he obtain that word 'because?' Let me group the three doubtful characters in pairs. Nothing. One by one. That's better. We have *es*, which may mean any one of a number of things. *ak* . ˙ . —and—"

The three characters ⋖ . ˙ . . which Gautier had believed formed the word "because" in reality formed three words, "with every one." The first line read: "Moktar the Clever, leave with every one for Bitter Waters." The third line proved correct: "From there to me on the third night."

"What's this—what's this?" Lartal grumbled. "Where does he get 'the Well of God?' "

He wrote four characters. I : E + *Tittawin*—well, waterhole. Yes, but also means "eyes." And the sign preceding which Gautier took for an incompleted *es.* is *ar* o. *Ar tittawin,* meaning "open eyes."

Lartal smiled with growing amusement:

" 'Open your eyes with Him who Sees!' A variant of 'Trust God, but keep your eyes open.' Alas, Tissek's politeness has sent poor Fontarge on a useless errand!"

Lartal laughed aloud. It was easily understood that Gautier did not recognize in the Tuareg *tittawin,* the Berber word *s'ri,* both meaning eyes. Tissek

had trusted in his boy to act as guide.

Lartal sent Samadin to fetch Nymaya.

"Tell me all," Lartal ordered.

Nymaya began, in a sort of chant, as if reciting the Koran:

"After a period when there was no fighting, one Frenchman left Timbuktu with several blacks and fought. Moktar el Khiani the Beraber heard of him. Therefore he dare not leave his men at El Maleka, as was his custom, and come on to El Abiddin without a strong escort. His main *harka** will follow him as far as Bir el Maya Mur† where they will await him, while he goes quickly to El Abiddin with a few men, there to get the merchandise sent him as tribute by Mohammed El Salek ben el Fassi, who is my master's master. The night will be tomorrow night, the third since my master received the news. My master is now on his way, by his own road, to be at the appointed place. He said to me:

" 'Nymaya, go thou to my friend, the Sidi Captain Lartal, guide him well and tell him all. If he be satisfied, he will give thee a reward. If not, I will slice off thy ears!' "

Lartal gave the negro a gold coin.

"And then?"

"I left my master where he is, which is secret as yet, and came straight to thy camp."

"Nymaya, why didst not thou speak thus to my friend, the other white chief?"

"He did not ask me. He thought me nothing—spoke to me in Bambara, just as if I had not been brought up in the tent."

"Thou hast spoken well, Nymaya. So thy master is coming to El Abiddin with the merchandise for Moktar el Khiani? Does it burden many camels?"

Nymaya smiled.

"No, indeed, it walks itself. Needs but few guards, a length of chain and good whips."

"Cattle?"

"No, captives."

Lartal started violently. Tissek was leading a "herd" of slaves to Moktar as tribute.

"Thy master knows that taking captives out of the colony is forbidden, Nymaya."

"His master Mohammed el Salek ben el Fassi sends them. He will not take them far, Captain," Namaya replied placidly. "For he knows that thou wilt prevent it."

"How many slaves is he taking north?"

"Twelve males and four-and-twenty females."

"I thought," Lartal said, "that the men were more in demand. Why so many women, Nymaya?"

Proud to be questioned by the captain, Nymaya smiled.

"Thou wilt understand soon. Since thou hast come and forbidden slaves to be taken away from the Sudan, they have become very dear in Morocco. Before, when any number could be taken—for there are so many, many blacks in the Sudan—they were cheap. The men were set to work, the women taken into harems. These women can not come out. So there are many men left, and few women. Therefore women are being taken to marry them, so that there still may be slaves when no more can be sent from the Sudan. These women that my master is taking north, Captain, they are beautiful and strong. Walking without much water on the sand for long months is very hard and, unless strong, the women die."

Nymaya, a black and a captive, spoke without emotion, while Lartal, free and white, was indignant. Slavery was a deep-rooted institution which even European powers found impossible to abolish at one stroke. The possession of slaves in the Sudan was permitted, but the exportation of them was forbidden.

In Black Africa a captive is almost a member of the family which he serves, shares the home and the food. A black master who abuses his slaves is as rare as a white man who beats his horse. It is only when the negro is sold to masters of another race that he suffers severely. The trip across the Saharan waste, on foot, without water for days, is a terrible

*Raiding band. †The Well of Bitter Waters.

ordeal, with the down-stroke of a Moorish *tilek* as the ultimate mercy.

"Slaves," Lartal repeated, with a tremor in his voice, "slaves? Art thou sure, Nymaya?"

"Did I not see them? Men and women. My master's master bought them near Say, far away. They will be taken across the river at night—perhaps this night—where your soldiers can't see. As they have been taken many times before."

"Dost thou know Bamba on the river?"

"Near here?" Nymaya grinned. "Scores of times have I been there."

"Canst thou remember this name—Dupic?"

"Dupic? Yes, he is a lieutenant there."

Lartal patted his shoulder with satisfaction.

"Thou dost know. Good lad! I will write a letter which thou'lt take to him. There is another white man at Bamba more powerful than Lieutenant Dupic. He must not see the letter. Hide it and give it to Dupic when no one sees thee. It is dark, but thou must go."

"Not by horse, Captain."

"How, then?"

"For a few coppers the fisherman will take me by canoe."

"Yes, anything, just so thou art there by daylight. Here, take this money, go and have all in readiness."

THE following morning, two hours before noon, Lartal met Lieutenant Dupic ten miles north of the village of Bamba, at the precise spot he had indicated in his note. He saw with satisfaction that the former Legionnaire had brought his men with him, between thirty and forty husky blacks.

"Here I am, Captain. But may lightning blast me if I understand what you're up to!"

Lartal pressed his hand warmly.

"I'll explain. But first—have you told anything of this to your commander in Bamba?"

"No. You said not to."

"You gave as an excuse for your leaving today a test march for your men?"

"Yes."

"How are your men equipped, Dupic?"

"One hundred cartridges apiece, three days' rations."

"Now whatever happens, I'll take everything on myself. If there's a fuss, I mean."

"You intend to do like—Lieutenant Fontarge?"

"Oh, no. Better."

"I guess if that's the basis of your plans, count me out. I've had my days in a cell—all I wish to have."

"Give me credit for not falling into the same pit I have just seen another man tumble into," Lartal urged. "In brief, here's my proposition, Dupic. Moktar el Khiani is within a striking distance of us with but a few men. And he is waiting the arrival of a caravan of slaves from the interior, to be taken to Morocco. You and I will stop that illicit traffic."

"I don't care if he moves the whole population of the Niger Loop northward," Dupic retorted with a shrug. "Wouldn't be worth my getting into trouble."

"Recall that the exportation of slaves is illegal, to be prevented by the French, Dupic."

"Yes, and we have strict orders to avoid operations of war, Captain. I like a 'smash-mug' as much as the next man, but—"

"Listen to me," Lartal begged patiently, "you know that Dufaure is out to satisfy the sentimentalists. He will not dare reprove us for preventing the slave trade going on under our very noses."

"Why?"

"Why? If he protests, or takes action against me or any one else for a combat fought to free slaves, he will have not only his own party but the entire nation against him. Moreover, as you know, the French government at this time has interest in not arousing antipathy in foreign lands. If we were punished for

fighting slave traders, all the humanitarian societies of the universe would howl. Religious groups in the Anglo-Saxon countries would protest, very likely through their respective consuls. France represents a civilization that abolished slavery as far back as the eighteenth century. Dufaure, who is keen, will sense the storm he would create, a storm that would blow him so far that he would never be heard from again. There are thirty-six slaves on the way to Moktar, to be taken on the terrific trip across the Sahara—and French soldiers, aware of the fact, have a clear duty!"

Dupic seemed moved, but not convinced.

"Dufaure will ask why we did not stop them before they crossed the Niger, therefore saving them and yet not fighting."

"To which we can sincerly reply that we heard too late to do so—that the only course open to us was to follow them."

"In that case, why couldn't I have told my commander?"

"He'd have delayed us purposely. And in two or three days who could swear that slaves were taken away?"

"I see. Where is Moktar el Khiani waiting?"

"Bir el Abiddin. Forty-five kilometers north, in a direct line. For you it will be nearer sixty, because I want you to circle them—without being seen, of course."

"When do you attack?"

"At dawn tomorrow. Do you believe you can have your men in position by that time?"

"With a couple of hours to spare. Those boys of mine will go as long as they have water, and click off their five kilometers an hour regular."

"Don't exaggerate. I know blacks."

"Not blacks under my orders, Captain. They'll go as far as I tell them to go, and in the time I give them to walk it. You see," Dupic said smiling, "I walk myself, and they figure out that if a white man can do it, they can."

"Then you agree to help me?"

"I've been agreeing for ten minutes, Captain. Now, if you've got good maps, give me the lay of the land. I don't want to get lost, especially during the night march when I close in."

Lartal unfolded a map, laid it on the ground, securing it with large pebbles against the strength of the wind. Dupic squatted at his side, while Werder, interested, came and stood behind them.

"Here is El Karim," Lartal said.

Then he explained to Dupic Fontarge's misinterpretation of the message and his intention to go to Bir el Karim.

"You were near Lieutenant Fontarge, Captain. Why didn't you call him?"

"Fontarge is practically a rebel. If I call on him for assistance, indications would point to a plot, an agreement. His sixteen men would not help us greatly—and I have half an idea that Moktar's scouts are watching him. Moktar's change of plans was brought about by the knowledge of Fontarge's presence. Let them watch him and leave us alone. While he's prowling around El Karim, keeping the riders of Moktar interested, we have every chance to move up unnoticed."

"There's only one thing that bothers me, Captain," Dupic resumed. "I want to be sure that the old fellow's main body is a safe distance away. You say he's leaving them at Bir el Maya Mur?"

"Bir el Maya Mur is a hundred kilometers away, at least. I've never happened to stop there, but I know it to be on the path from El Maleka to El Abiddin."

"Whereabouts on the map, Captain?" Dupic insisted. "It never brought anybody any luck to go ahead without knowing what was apt to fall on his back. I don't see that place on this map."

"To satisfy you I'll check up the locations." Lartal brought out the sheaf of small sketches, scanned them rapidly until he came to the enlargement of the section he sought. "Here, these are absolutely correct."

"I don't read Arabic, Captain, so it's no use showing me. Why didn't you translate the names into French?"

"These sketches were for my own use," Lartal said, a bit impatiently. "Here is El Maleka—but no mention of El Maya Mur—although I'll swear I've heard the name before."

Dupic grinned broadly.

"There you are! Shows you it's bad to work things out from memory."

"This seems to prove it, I agree." Lartal rose and beckoned to Nymaya. "This lad should know the various names." He dropped into Arabic, "The Well of Bitter Waters—how else is it called?"

"It has several names," Nymaya replied.

He listed several which Lartal tried to identify on the sketch before him. The negro spoke in a chanting voice, checking off the names on his fingers.

Suddenly Lartal halted him,

"What's that last?"

"El Karim."

"Art thou sure?"

"Yes, Captain."

"It is well. Go." Lartal turned to Dupic, grimly, "I'm a bigger fool than you thought. El Karim and El Maya Mur are one and the same place."

"So that Fontarge—"

"Is going headlong into Moktar's main band."

"When did he start?" Dupic inquired calmly.

"Yesterday afternoon, I believe."

"Then there's no use worrying. Whatever is to happen will happen before a messenger can reach him."

"Lieutenant Fontarge is one of the ablest officers I know," Lartal declared desperately. "Believing himself to be creeping upon Moktar, he will use great caution—and extricate himself in time should he blunder into the whole of the Beraber's forces."

"Perhaps. But though they have no officers in the strict sense of the word, they have leaders quite as clever as the lieutenant," Dupic volunteered, lighting his pipe. "Anyway, they'll have other things to think of besides bothering us."

"If we started now we would be of no use to him."

"No. We can't cover over a hundred kilometers by mere wishing."

"Fontarge may be massacred—"

"We may be, as well, Captain. Here's my map. You mark my road upon it, will you? And I presume it will be as usual in such affairs—I'll wait for your first shot before attacking."

"Yes. There'll be moonlight the last few hours of the night, and I can ride up without much difficulty. They'll probably try to run for it when I attack, and it's up to you to stop them."

"Rest easy on that score, Captain." Dupic hesitated. "Fontarge may have played in luck. In that case he'll join us later."

"If not, he was caught near El Maya Mur—and it may be all over at this moment."

"After all, if the worst happened, it's no more than what we all expect out here."

"Fontarge was born lucky," Lartal insisted. "In everything except cards. He'll show up again."

This convinced no one, not even himself.

THE fine dust lifted from the sand by the trotting horses clung to the perspiring faces of the riders. Beneath the dingy helmets the cheeks of the negroes appeared gray-white; when they closed their eyes to shut off the flying dirt the lids sagged swiftly, like small wrinkled black curtains.

Fontarge might have believed himself in the heart of the desert rather than within easy journey of the Great River. Small, fleecy clouds drifted in the white-hot sky. The naked land swept to the northern rim of the earth, the buffs, yellows and browns agleam with patches of fine white sand, the sparkling of mica and the stab of light as the sharp edge of a rock caught the rays of the sun like an unsheathed knife.

Far off, the wind lifted the dust in spiraling pillars that briskly spread into a brownish haze, thinned out and vanished into the blue.

By turning slightly in the saddle the lieutenant could see the dark irregular line marking the extreme advance of vegetation, and behind this line the horizon like a taut, quivering stretch of sheer azure silk.

Several hundred yards ahead the red coat of the "point" Spahi stood out against the ground. On the sides flankers rode, at ease in the saddle, carbines slung across their backs. Fontarge smiled. The desert border was not like the bush country where an officer is often out of sight of his scouts. This was like playing the game on the smooth velvet of a billiard table. There seemed little danger of surprize where one could see miles in every direction.

Occasionally, however, Fontarge became thoughtful—when point or flankers vanished into the depressions between low drifts. No danger of surprize? Those land swells, seemingly insignificant, might shelter hundreds of men. He recalled that Lartal had told him that native marauders knew well how to take advantage of these depressions, to twist and turn without once emerging into sight until they had attained their goal, whether favorable position for a rush or a sure line of retreat.

Gautier, who was a novice, appeared completely drunk with the sensation of space, laughed without reason, whistled.

"Getting near, Lieutenant?"

"Yes. We'll camp soon and wait for late afternoon before going on to El Karim. Moktar should be there by sunset."

"We could camp over by the bushes over there," Gautier indicated.

Possibly indicating an underground stream flowing toward the Niger, a long row of bushes was in evidence at the left of the detachment. On its fringes thick tufts of grass sprouted. A sort of rocky ledge miniature cliff, three or four feet in height, cut the undulated soil to the north.

"Yes, later," Fontarge agreed.

They rode on silently for another hour, following a path parallel to the row of bushes. Fontarge became conscious of a change in his men's attitude. Although he had not decreased the pace of his mount, he turned to find them grouped closely behind him. Nothing had been seen, nothing had occurred, yet Fontarge knew that this unconscious massing was an unfailing sign of trouble. What warned the blacks? Perhaps instinct—inherited knowledge.

He rose in the stirrups, strove to pierce the horizon with his glance, Gautier, gripped by the sudden hush, had stopped laughing, whistled no more.

When the report of a carbine resounded, Fontarge was almost happy. One way or another, it was best for the tension to be removed. A visible enemy is far better than nervous expectancy. No smoke lifted, silence closed down like a lid. The lieutenant could not determine who had fired, whether a foe or one of his own men.

The "point" man had halted, waited.

"Who shot?" Fontarge asked him, when within call.

"I did—men in the bushes ahead."

"One—two? How many?"

"I saw two. There are others, else those two would have fled when I fired."

Upon a sign from Fontarge, the Spahis unslung their carbines and verified the loading.

"At a walk, boys. Spread out! Spread out!"

Ahead, the mimosas seemed deserted; to make certain, Fontarge lifted his field glasses to scan the bushes. As he did so, he was fired upon. As if blooming out of the sand, turbans appeared, enough of them to cause the lieutenant to hesitate.

They were four hundred yards away, and he could not ascertain their identity, whether Berabers or dissident Tuareg. Behind the men in the mimosas others filed, spreading on the left flank of the French detachment. Soon after, near the cliff, more warriors appeared. Fontarge rather believed them to be Berabers from the ease with which they had kept out of sight until they were ready to show themselves. Southern Tuareg were

usually less patient, more eager to come to close quarters.

"Hold your fire!" Fontarge ordered and as he had expected, the Berabers also held back. They were evidently waiting for developments, and not wasting powder.

But when Fontarge tried to move his men one way or another, the fusillade immediately broke out. Eight or nine hundred yards in his rear, the lieutenant saw additional gatherings, men on foot supported by groups of riders. Spearheads shone in the sun.

The lieutenant gathered his men around him and spoke for them as well as for Gautier, knowing them to be firm and unlikely to give way to panic.

"We're surrounded, that's obvious. We've got to get out, and it won't be easy. Dismount for a time, and we'll see whether those fellows will give us any idea of their plans by moving before we move."

He set the example. But the Berabers did not come nearer.

"Is it really serious?" Gautier asked.

"Serious!" Fontarge looked at the sergeant in amazement. "So much so that—"

Gautier paled and the luminous black eyes seemed to flame in his ashen face. He forced himself to smile.

"I've heard a great deal about this sort of thing, Lieutenant. But I scarcely expected to have the honor to figure in a massacre—so soon."

"There's always hope, Gautier. I've been as near as this before. I'm sorry I took you along. It's too soon for you."

Gautier clenched his teeth so that the muscles ridged his cheeks. Mechanically he brought the belt higher around his waist, loosened the revolver in the holster.

"Never mind, Lieutenant—it's all experience!"

"Listen to me, Gautier. Sooner or later we'll have to make a break for it, through their lines. And in this sort of situation, the sooner the better. I may be wrong, but it's my belief that the strongest masses are in our rear—those fellows naturally believing we'll retrace our steps. If we go straight ahead, the farther we go the better they'll like it. They'll simply keep up with us on the flanks. There are a good many men hidden in those bushes. Furthermore, if we charge in that direction, they'll avoid the shock, race backward, checking us just sufficiently to give the others time to come to their assistance. That ledge over there is our only chance. Horses can climb it easily, in one leap."

"I believe so, Lieutenant," Gautier agreed.

He had gathered control of himself and was smoking impassively.

"I noticed that they had placed no men upon the ledge. It stands to reason that their horses are not as good as ours after the long trips they have been forced to take. As for the camels, they are not to be worried about over a short distance. Once on top of that ledge, which is in reality a sharp rise of soil that runs level for miles beyond, there is a good chance to circle them and escape to the south. After that is done, it's any man's race."

"Yes, Lieutenant."

"Now, I brought you into this. I want to get you out. I'll go straight at them, leading eight men, and you will have charge of the others. I'll go on until I hit them, while you swing off, as they're massing to receive me, climb that ledge and beat it. It will be some seconds before they realize what is being done, and it will take several minutes longer for them to decide what to do, which group to concentrate upon. Get in the saddle, now!"

Gautier grasped his chief's arm.

"Just a moment, please. I know I was scared blue, but that is no reason to insult me. I believe it is customary for men to stick together in a case such as this."

Fontarge shook Gautier's hand away.

"It is customary for a sergeant to obey his superior—you'll do as I say."

Gautier's teeth flashed in a quck smile.

"You're a fine example of obedience. I refuse flatly. You are not Lieutenant Fontarge to me; you're just a fool who'd carry foolishness too far. And, friend

Fontarge, how would you select those negroes to deliberately kill off with yourself?'

"They'll obey!"

"I don't believe our blacks, any of them, would leave you. Anyway, it would seem strange if I escaped alone. I refuse obedience."

"I seem to have brought you ill-luck, old man."

"Yes, you're the evil companion my father warned me against when I enlisted, I guess." Gautier laughed. "Say, they are extremely considerate, giving us time to converse at length."

"They feel that they have plenty of time. For me to argue against your decision would be bad taste, Gautier, which is the only sin left for me to commit. We'll rush toward the rear until they mass to receive us, then strike for the ledge. I've been something of a gambler, but I wouldn't bet on our succeeding. Those lads across the way think quickly and act almost before they think."

Around the two white men, the cavalrymen were grouped, fingering their amulets. One of the Spahis, something of a spiritual leader when occasion demanded, was praying. After waiting a reasonable length of time, Fontarge suggested mildly that they get into the saddles. There was a last pause. The lieutenant laughed nervously.

"Say, Gautier, I came out here because of a big loss at cards. The fellow who flipped the wrong card to me—I can still see his hands, smooth, white, with sparkling rings—little knew he was murdering me."

Gautier managed to smile once more. He had taken the strap of his helmet between his teeth, to prevent the loss of the headgear. It was not his intention to be struck down by the sun.

Ten feet away from his chief Suleyman, Seydou was chanting:

"We are marching on toward Death,
Which is blacker than the Night;
The married, they leave sons to mourn them,
But those who run from hut to hut—
Who will know that they have gone?"

Fontarge drew his saber. He explained to the blacks his plan.

"When we are near, discharge your carbines. Then—sabers. Ready, Gautier? Ready, boys?"

"Ready!"

The lieutenant lifted his saber high. He hesitated a fraction of a second, then—

"Charge!"

He was exultant that his voice sounded clear. It would have been shameful to order one's last charge in a high-pitched, strangled falsetto.

The enemy rifles crackled again. Soon, the Spahis fired their carbines. Ahead, the Berabers were gathering to bar the path. Long before the cavalrymen were upon the first line that had been visible to them, warriors were about, rising from the sand, where they had crawled without being seen. Spears flew through the air, and the strokes of the sabers could be heard as one of the Spahis swung wide to cut at a fleeting figure. A full eighty yards away a Beraber attracted Fontarge's attention. He stood braced for a throw, spear held back. The lieutenant fired at him with his revolver, without result. The warrior swung his arm forward—

"Too far," Fontarge thought.

A shock against his chest threw him upon the rump of his horse. He felt himself slipping, dropped his weapons and clutched vainly for a grip. He fell on the sand, face down, was conscious of pain, then of whirling men about him, of grunts. Again he was in the saddle, his head strangely clear.

He saw Gautier hold up his arm he heard him shout:

"Left wheel—left wheel—*Nom de Dieu!*"

Fontarge was pleased. Yes, now, the ridge was on the left. The warriors near it, pressed between the charging horsemen and the wall, were broken, scattered. The two white men, center of the red-coated negroes, surged upward.

"We made it, Lieutenant," he heard Gautier call faintly. Yet the sergeant's face was close to his. He could not answer, though he saw that the non-com

was bleeding from a cut received somewhere.

At his side some one spoke in Bambara.

"Suleyman is not here—"

"Nor is Sankare—"

"They are following us—"

Then Fontarge knew that he was on a horse, knew that on either side strong arms held him in the saddle. His head spun, and he was sliding down long banks of fog, grayish fog, soft and slippery—down—down—down—

And above, where a sun small as a pinhead glowed, where there was life, men shouted, shots crackled. Crackled until the sun was extinguished and all was still.

LARTAL lifted a whistle to his lips, blew a prolonged, tremulous note, scarcely more than a metallic breath, a call to attention. In the growing light he could discern the slender form of Nymaya surrounded by the taller, broader silhouettes of the Spahis.

Guided by Nymaya, the detachment had passed through the first line of guards thrown out by Moktar without being discovered. The Berabers, who had come to the same spot each year undisturbed, had been lulled into a sense of security. Doubtless the sentries had been asleep; asleep, as were the men grouped about the fires that smoldered perhaps half a kilometer away.

Many times before Lartal had led an attack at dawn. Yet the thrill he experienced this morning was mingled with a vague apprehension. Things had gone too well for him thus far. He could not be certain that Moktar had been tricked. Perhaps he had left the fires and was already far to the northwest. Also the captain recalled other men he had known who had stood thus in the half-light, filled with hope, elated with the nearness of triumph and who had fallen before the full rise of the sun. These brief moments of excitement, so pleasant in retrospection, invariably proved an agony of incertitude.

"Open order! Pass the word—open order!"

Despite the unavoidable noises caused by the execution of this command, no challenge came. Another whistled call, shorter, sharper, followed by two brief blasts in quick succession, and the cavalrymen trotted their horses forward, scabbards rattling.

A sickening thought swept Lartal that he had come too late, that the well was abandoned.

Then a man arose, almost under the hoofs of his horse.

"*Ma temacen?*" he asked mechanically. "Who are you?"

Lartal leaned over and tore the rifle from his unsteady hands. As the fog of sleep left his brain, the man realized that he was not among friends and ran. A Spahi overhauled him in two strides, swung wide from the saddle and the sentry was punished for sleeping on duty.

An interval of quiet, then another man shouted, from a distance—

"*Ma temacen?*"

He waited several seconds for an answer, then fired.

The vibration of this first shot had not died out when a crashing volley came from the right, opposite the enemy's camp. Lartal smiled. Dupic was in position. So eager and impatient had his men been to attack that it seemed as if the finger that had pressed the first trigger had sprung the triggers of Dupic's *tirailleurs*.

The long fierce howl of charging infantrymen rose, answered by the shouts of the Spahis. Even Lartal joined in the outcry, firing his revolver blindly into the swirl of men that swept over the low wall of spiny bushes erected for the well's protection by the raiders, fear-crazed men who fled from bayonets only to fall under sabers. The captain saw more Berabers than he had expected, but there were not enough of them to resist for long. Behind the *zeriba* of thorny branches were a few tents, and toward these Lartal led his men.

But the infantrymen had reached them ahead of Lartal and had wiped out the

men within. Dupic, his face distorted with excitement, hailed Lartal thunderously:

"Eh, I saw him! I saw him!"

He pointed toward the north.

Lartal tore a carbine from one of his men, held out his hand to receive cartridges. Moktar was on a camel, undoubtedly. But for a short distance his horse was likely to prove the better mount. Griot was superior to other animals in the detachment, and Lartal was soon far in the lead, followed by Nymaya, ten or more lengths behind.

As he rode, Lartal cursed himself and Dupic. The lieutenant had the opportunity to drop Moktar and failed to take advantage of it. If Moktar succeeded in escaping now and gained the open, he was safe. In a few hours he could join his warriors at El Maya Mur, and then—there was nothing to do save admit disastrous failure.

"Captain — there — there!" Nymaya called. "Moktar—"

The Spahis took up the cry.

"Moktar—Moktar—"

Lartal saw the Beraber leader emerging from a low gully on to higher ground, not far distant. Lartal dropped from his saddle, and knelt. He was suddenly very calm. With the familiar weapon in his hand and a clear target before him, he felt as certain of the future as if his hand already rested on the chief's shoulder.

He pressed the trigger deliberately, noted the point where the bullet hit the sand, ejected the empty cartridge, replaced it. The next shot brought the camel down. The figure in blue and white, perched high on the animal's hump and neck, was thrown forward violently, struck the sand and lay still. Nymaya, shrieking with excitement, passed by Lartal, waving his pistol exultantly.

"He's dead—he's dead—"

Then Moktar rose swiftly, hesitated, probably seeking for help. There were none of his warriors near him, and those farther away were hard-pressed by Spahis. Before Lartal could fire again, the man from Tafilalet ran toward the carcass of the camel, slid out of sight behind the yellow hulk and opened fire with a magazine weapon. Nymaya fell, landed on all fours, then relaxed, one arm outflung.

The Spahis, as they arrived near their chief, followed his example, dismounted and threw themselves on the sand. Lartal did not need to forbid them to advance farther. The lone man ahead, who represented years of terror for their race, awed them.

"Leave him to me!" Lartal shouted.

It had occurred to him that Moktar, killed in action, retained his prestige. Captured and taken to Timbuktu like a common smuggler, he would be ridiculous—a desert man in chains! At the range, he felt certain that he could place a bullet wherever he desired. He decided to smash Moktar's shoulder when he next exposed himself.

Moktar's turban appeared. He fired his piece and vanished. Samadin calmly informed Lartal that his thigh had been pierced.

Lartal frankly admired his foe. Moktar el Khiani knew well that the French would prefer his capture to his death on the field. He was aware that should he hold up his hands in token of surrender he would be spared for several days, possibly escape execution in exchange for an oath of friendship. But he had evidently come to the conclusion that it would be best to die as he had lived—free.

Lartal, the soldier, felt that he owed Moktar, the warrior, a last homage, a great mercy. Why should he not grant him the death he desired?

He held his carbine ready. The turban reappeared.

Lartal fired.

MOKTAR EL KHIANI was found dead behind the camel, kneeling with his head resting on the round flank of the beast. One hand dug long fingers in the cloth covering of the wooden saddle. The other still clasped the rifle.

With trembling hands Lartal lifted the

limp form, eager to see the face. And he staggered, for he had exerted too great an effort for the weight he had to lift. Moktar, reputed to be a tall man, seemed even longer when stretched upon the sand. But his body was strangely light.

The blood-stained veil had slipped from the face, the features under the green turban were fully exposed. Lartal gazed down upon a powerful, cruel mask—the features of a very old man. The eyes were the center of converging wrinkles, the limbs emerging from the folds of the *gandoura* were stringy, dried, almost mummified. Extreme emaciation explained the lightness of the body. Yet a moment ago, the captain had seen this old man give proof of agility and strength, of keen vision; and the wide open mouth, in the frame of red-stained beard, showed strong yellowish teeth.

Lartal's triumph was suffused with an uncomfortable sense of shame. All his plans, all these men, to kill an old man—a man half a century older than himself. But what a man!

One of the negroes kicked off the turban, grasped the lock of white hair growing on the shaven skull. Deftly he freed the dead man's shoulder of clothing, with the tip of the saber. Then he glanced at Lartal for confirmation of his intended deed. True, to crown victory in the eyes of the blacks, Moktar should be beheaded.

"Leave him alone!" Lartal ordered sharply.

The torso thumped back upon the ground and the puzzled soldier sheathed his saber.

"Wrap him in the cloth from the saddle and place him on a horse. He must be seen in Timbuktu, so that all may know he is truly dead."

Dupic arrived. He had already learned that Lartal had carried his plans to conclusion.

"We've got the slaves, Captain. Everything is settled." He glanced down casually, nodded. "There he is."

The invincible had been vanquished; Moktar el Khiani was slain; the Undying was dead.

"HOW is he?" Lartal asked anxiously when Lieutenant-Colonel Deligny closed the door of the infirmary behind him.

"As well as one can expect a man to be with a perforated lung. The doctor says that he has a chance—would have every chance if he was not weakened by a long stay in Africa. You can go in and see him for a few minutes. By the way—" Deligny added warningly, "he knows nothing about the death of Moktar. He believes you came straight back to Timbuktu after seeing him. As for his own predicament, I told him that he would not be bothered when he recovered. It will keep him from fretting."

"In reality, Colonel, what is his status?"

"That of a gentleman who had taken sixteen men without orders, and brought back seven, four of them cut up. Oh, he can boast of having worried me, that lad!"

"Is Gautier under arrest?"

"No, under no circumstances will I permit him to be punished. He is young and followed a superior. And he performed mighty well for a novice. I understand the retreat was not easy. A man of his type is too good for the penal companies. As long as I have stripes on my sleeves, the boy will be left alone."

Lartal hesitated.

"Am I to consider myself under arrest, Colonel?"

"You need not keep to your room, no. Do your routine duty as if nothing had occurred. I have written for particular instructions from Governor Dufaure." Deligny smiled. "You have a pretty good story to offer. Nevertheless you were not sent out to do what you did do. If Governor Dufaure wants to push the case against you, the worst that can happen is a hint for your resignation. But you waved the flag of humanity, saved slaves. So I guess your troubles will soon be over." Deligny pressed his hand encouragingly. "Go in and see your friend—then straighten your report for Major Delaurier."

Fontarge, thin and yellow, opened his

eyes when Lartal sat down at the head of his bed, and smiled weakly.

"Do you suffer much, old man?"

"No. I feel queer, though."

"You'll be on your feet in a month."

Without moving his head, Fontarge glanced at the military surgeon standing some distance away.

"Listen, Lartal," he whispered. "I know there's something being kept from me. Tell him that knowing will be better for me than uncertainty—you understand—"

The surgeon evidently was keen of hearing, for he came toward the bed and touched Fontarge lightly on the arm.

"You're right. With a constitution like yours you should not be treated like an invalid. Tell him what he wishes to know, Captain Lartal. My friend, listen, but don't move."

Lartal told him of the events that had led up to the death of Moktar el Khiani.

"After it was all over I looked for Tissek, who had come with the slaves. Whether Moktar suspected him immediately when the attack came and took the time to shoot him or our own men did it in the excitement, we will never know. He was stone dead. You never saw such a sight as that encampment after we struck it. There were about fifty Berabers there, and not a dozen got away."

"I'm glad you told me. I sort of sensed it was finished. I'd have hated to slip over without knowing. On the level, now, do you think I'll pull through this?"

"Yes. And don't fear—you'll have a chance to speak your piece." Lartal laughed softly. "You'd rise from the grave to carry your point against Dufaure."

"You bet I would. Beat it now, I want to rest. And drop in once in a while to keep me informed."

FOR days Lartal waited for his orders to proceed to Bamako, there to explain his conduct to Governor Dufaure. Deligny protested that he had received no instructions concerning him or Fontarge. And, before a month had passed, it was announced that Dufaure was leaving for the coast. No one could understand his prolonged silence concerning the disobedience of several officers.

At the end of two months, Fontarge had almost completely recovered. No more than Lartal did he know whether he was in good standing or slated for court martial.

The solution was brought by the newspapers from France, ten weeks following Lartal's return to Timbuktu. Lartal ripped the address band from a copy of the official government organ, a famous Paris daily. Mechanically he scanned the headlines.

"Listen to this, Fontarge!" he exclaimed suddenly.

"Go on."

" 'The End of a Famous Bandit. It is reported from the Sudan that Moktar el Khiani, chieftain of native raiders, for many years a threat against commerce in the Sudanese Sahel and the western Sahara, was slain during an engagement against colonial troops commanded by Captain Lartal, of the Spahis and Lieutenant Dupic, of the infantry. Included in the booty captured by our men were thirty-six slaves, immediate cause of the French expedition. These unfortunate blacks were being taken north for sale in Morocco.' "

"Bravo! Fame for you—"

"Listen: 'In a minor engagement preceding the general onslaught, Lieutenant Fontarge of the Second Spahis, was gravely wounded. Sergeant Gautier was slightly wounded. Nine native troopers were killed and three wounded. Governor Dufaure has asked for promotion for both Captain Lartal and Lieutenant Dupic. The Legion of Honor is proposed for Lieutenant Fontarge, the Military Medal for Sergeant Gautier, and three silver medals for the troopers. Governor Dufaure, in his citation, praises the young lieutenant for lion-like courage and great ability in extricating himself and his men from a desperate situation.' "

"I don't understand—" Fontarge muttered.

"Here is the editorial of the same date: 'In our news columns we report another success for our arms in the Sudan. That the officers and men of our colonial army show heroism is no exception to the rule. Of far greater moment, to the true observer, is the proof thus offered that conquest and humanity may march hand in hand. Governor Dufaure, in the face of much criticism advised gentle methods with native tribes, leaving for the future to show that he could be strong against bandits. Scorned by the military element at first, he quietly prepared the trap into which the famous Moktar el Khiani was caught, directed the operations of Captain Lartal and Lieutenant Fontarge with consummate skill. In our admiration for the weapon, let us not forget admiration for the guiding hand. Governor Dufaure has proved himself a fighter as well as a peerless administrator."

Fontarge, suffocated with indignation, shook his fist menacingly.

"I'll fling the cross in his face, rather than accept it from him."

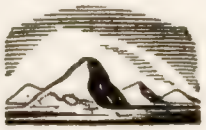
"You'll do nothing. In the first place, it would be foolish. Second, you will never see Dufaure again—in the Sudan. I have just read that he is bound for France. He will resign, for his purpose down here is accomplished, his reputation inflated. He will strive for bigger things at home, and some fine day will be Prime Minister."

"My men were killed, I was wounded—for him! And Moktar was killed—for Dufaure?"

Lartal filled two glasses.

"Be a good loser, Fontarge. To Dufaure, master strategist!"

"To Dufaure, politician!"



# *The Porcelain Pirates*

BY

HELEN VON KOLNITZ HYER

AS THE eighteenth century dawned in Europe, Fate laughed a long laugh up one sleeve of his flowing robes, rolled up the other sleeve and with a deft shake or two set about to concoct a solution to the mystery which had been baffling the best intellects in Europe for more than a hundred years: The secret of making that rare, mysterious, beautiful, fragile material which was filtering into Europe from the Orient—the fabulous porcelain of China.

Even the name is romantic; the Italians called it *porcellana*, meaning "a cowry shell," for thus only could they describe its unearthly, translucent beauty.

The daring Portuguese and Dutch navigators who first trafficked in quantities of the precious stuff were sure of a fortune with each cargo which they succeeded in bringing past the hungry reefs of uncharted seas. What stupendous reward, then, awaited the European potter who could first discover the secret of its manufacture!

The "China" mania was at its height when Fate stretched forth a thumb and forefinger and selected his reagents for the fatal experiment. Item one: a dissolute young student. Item two: a bankrupt prince. Item three: the wife of a barber. Pouf!

It was a dark and stormy night in 1701 when Johann Böttger, a youthful alchemist in Berlin, fled for his life before the threats of a mob which accused him of having learned how to transmute all metals into gold. But the sun shone warmly upon his youthful impudence when he sought and secured protection in Dresden from the Elector of Saxony by artfully hinting that although he had not actually discovered all of the secret of transmutation of metals, his certain success was assured if he could continue his experiments.

The prince, being royally in need of money, set him up in a laboratory with Tschirnhausen, an aged philosopher who was interested in ceramic research. Here Böttger became intrigued with the possibilities of porcelain discovery and experimented on the side. One day while trying to improve the materials for his crucible he accidentally produced a fine red stoneware which he called "red porcelain" because it resembled a Chinese earthenware imported by the Portuguese. Success seemed assured, but in spite of all his efforts the red ware remained red—he could not produce the translucent white.

Worn out with his failures and the hermitlike atmosphere of the laboratory, Böttger sought relaxation in worldly comfort. Pinked out in his smartest clothes and with a cocked hat slapped rakishly upon his curled wig, he was quite the gay young spark. Except the wig—it was not so prosperous in appearance as it might have been. The remedy? Oh, yes—a barber!

Böttger repaired to a near-by barber shop and was meticulously powdered about the wig.

"An excellent powder—so white, so smooth. A discovery of my own—at least of my wife—" babbled the barber. "What's that, sir? A trifle heavy? To be sure, but it sticks close to the wig, and a slight heaviness is to be expected since it comes from the earth."

Beneath the now resplendent wig Böttger's ears rose into sharp points.

"From the earth? Where? How?" he exclaimed, springing from the chair.

And Fate, smiling a bit sardonically, shifted his spatula and plopped the escaping reagent back into his stewing pot. For here was the lacking ingredient, the white earthen body. The kaolin of the Chinese, found in a barber shop and, as the barber's wife excitedly explained, it lay in tons in the near-by hills!

Böttger went back to his workshop, wig and all. More done with the world than he knew. For when his genius has blossomed in the first successful display of white hard paste porcelains, the Elector of Saxony awakened to the importance of Böttger's find; he ruthlessly removed Böttger, his factory and his workmen to the castle of Albrechtsburg at Meissen and kept them practically as prisoners. No visitors were allowed within the fortress. The workmen were pledged to secrecy. It is said that the motto, "Secret Unto Death," was written over the factory door. Into the once empty coffers of the Elector of Saxony flowed a steadily increasing stream of gold from the sale of Böttger's ceramic masterpieces.

But Fate, having perfected his solution, and knowing that no royal edict could keep it bottled up in a prison, gradually discarded the used reagents.

Through escaping workmen the secret of porcelain making spread to the neighboring states—and the war was on.

It was a period without patents or protection. Whoever wanted anything could have it if he were strong enough to take it.

But small reward came to Böttger. He died at the early age of thirty-four, ten years after his discovery of the process for making white porcelain. During the entire eighteen years which he had spent in Saxony under the "protection of the Elector," he had been kept practically as a prisoner. Died of overwork and, if some chroniclers may be believed, from drowning his sorrows in the contents of his marvelous cups.

The Elector waxed portly and prosperous for a time. Böttger's work was carried on by others. But Fate had not forgotten him.

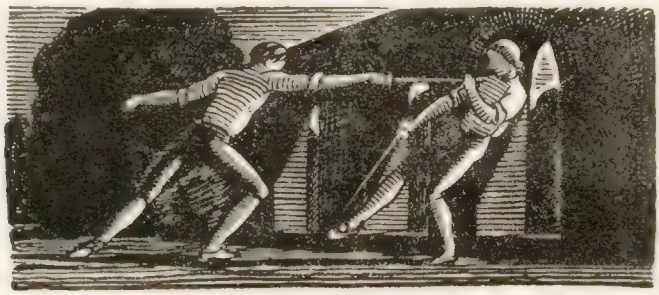
Formulas were stolen and sold. Soon his neighbor, Frederick of Prussia, casting a roving eye upon the treasure trove at Meissen, picked a quarrel, and during the Seven Years' War, 1756–1763, looted the factory and removed porcelains, molds, workmen and everything to Berlin. Later the factory was rebuilt, but its glory had passed.

An old beggar woman in the streets of Dresden years later was found to be the wife of the barber and here for once Fate was kind. Her last days were comforted by a pension from the Government—a belated payment for her services in discovering the kaolin of Aue.

And here, almost at the beginning of the tale, we must leave it. For its involutions and convolutions were at the bottom of some of the wars which rocked Europe and of the adventuring which planted the great Dutch and British empires in the East.

And the kaolin deposits of Germany, so innocently used as a barber's wig powder, were destined to play their part as the German potash problem of the Great War.

*A Novel of Royalty in the Young Republic*



*Concluding*

# *Cockades*

## By MEADE MINNIGERODE

RAOUL DE VENDOME had been born too late to experience the thrill of personal loyalty to the dead King of France, to the beautiful murdered queen, to their little son, the Dauphin, of whose evil fate no one could tell. Raoul had early come to the new land, the young United States, where each man built his own life. Yet by descent and tradition young de Vendome was a royalist, a wearer of the white cockade.

And so he found himself in Orleans seeking the mysterious captive of the Spaniards who was called *El Niño*, and who might be the lad, Francis Vincent, around whom the hopes of the old aristocracy still centered, whom they believed to be the lost Dauphin, and who had been stolen from them and lost again by spies of republican France.

De Vendome's mission progressed slowly. True, he had strangled Ducros, a republican spy, and had learned that *El Niño* was indeed the lad he sought, but the boy was so well guarded that Raoul could not communicate with him, or hope to help him to escape. And soon the Spaniards would transfer their prisoner to the living tomb of the Morro in Havana, for Orleans was being transferred to the French and by them to America.

Then Mr. de Valmy, of the French secret police, told de Vendome he would help him. De Valmy produced forged documents to substantiate his claim of being a disguised royalist and de Vendome, weary of his mission and longing to return to peaceful Greenwich and Polly Moore, accepted him as an ally. The two planned to intercept the boy as he was being transferred aboard the Spanish ship. They would take him to their own ship and sail—to free New York, thought Raoul de Vendome, to a French prison, plotted de Valmy.

But Francis Vincent escaped from the Spaniards himself and took refuge in a coach occupied by a young lady. The young lady agreed to protect him, but stopped at the Ursuline convent to get the Mother Superior as a chaperon. While she was out of the coach Raoul de

Vendome came by, so the two ladies found two young men in the coach.

Martinique d'Aurelle was very angry at this imposition, but the Mother Superior invited the two to come into her parlor. She had recognized Francis Vincent. So the boy was among friends at last.

But he rebelled.

"I will not go back to France," he said. "I will live out my own life as Francis Vincent, or if that name is too dangerous, as Francis Jones."

Young de Vendome sympathized with the boy, but the Mother Superior insisted that he fulfil his duty to his country. The argument was at its height when the Duke de Colignac was announced.

"Show him in," said the Mother Superior.

## CHAPTER XIII

### MARTINIQUE

"*MISÉRICORDE!*" Raoul cried. "What are you doing? The Duc de Colignac is the head of the royalist party in France—he will never agree to the Dauphin's abdication! Mother Superior, what are you going to say to him?"

"You wouldn't be so cruel!" Francis begged her. "You will not give me away? You will say that I am Francis Jones, an American?"

She would not reply to their frantic questions. Raoul pulled Francis away, over to the corner of the room. Mr. de Colignac was at the door.

"Reverend Mother," he said, bowing from the threshold, "will you permit a traveler just landed in the midst of these republican festivities to enjoy for a few moments the more austere quiet of your *parloir?*"

He was superb, the duke—tall, soldierly in his long, pleated traveling cloak, dressed from head to foot in black setting forth his ruffles, gray-eyed above a white mustache bristling under his blunt nose, carrying his years with the vigor of an old campaigner, endowed with an inexhaustible courtliness. Armand Jacques Bernard d'Aurelle; Duc de Colignac; Quartermaster General of France; Receiver of the Duchy of Bar and Lorraine; First Chamberlain to the Duke of Normandy, Dauphin of France; Commander in Chief of the royalist armies of the Vendée; godfather to Raoul de Vendome. The last person, Raoul was thinking, to have come walking into this room.

The Mother Superior rose to greet him.

"Come in, Armand." She smiled at him. "Come in and stop making speeches. How many years has it been?"

"Too many years," he told her. "I have grown gray, then white. You on the other hand are not a day older."

"Sit down," she advised him, "and try and remember where you are. What brings you here?"

"I am really on my way to Philadelphia," he exclaimed, "to see de la Roche and his company concerning a certain matter, but I came by way of Orleans to have a look at my little cousin d'Aurelle, your little Martinique. Why they should want to name her after an island I never could understand."

"She was born there," the Mother Superior reminded him, "just before they moved to Santo Domingo. You will find her charming."

"I am told she runs the house," he began, "ever since—"

"Just a second, forgive me," the Mother Superior interrupted him. "I was quite forgetting. These gentlemen—do you recognize your godson, Armand?"

The duke swung around in his chair.

"Not really!" he exclaimed. "Is it Raoul de Vendome? My dear boy, what good fortune to find you! I would never have known you."

Raoul came forward to embrace the old gentleman.

"We must have a good talk." The duke gave him a long stare. "You will have news from Philadelphia no doubt. And who is that other gentleman?"

Francis crossed the room to the Mother

Superior's side, looking down at her with a little challenging smile.

"Will you not present me to your visitor?" he suggested.

Raoul examined his fingertips. Well, why not? Let her settle it. When she had summoned Mr. de Colignac she had certainly intended to reveal the Dauphin's identity to the one person who would never dream of permitting his renunciation. Under the circumstances it was clever of Francis to place himself in her hands, to accept in advance her decision. It would flatter her, soften perhaps her rigid royalism, appeal possibly to her good mother confessor's heart.

She took the hand which Francis held out and patted it.

"What do you think of our young friend?" she asked the duke. "Is he not a fine young man? Would he not look well in the white uniform of the Vendée?"

"Certainly, certainly," the duke agreed with her, cocking his eye at Francis. "A very fine young man, I'm sure. A little young for your uniform. Only the generals wore white."

"And you do not think that he would be a general?"

"Not today, certainly," the duke laughed. "There are not enough soldiers to have generals. The Dauphin himself would not have been a general as things are now. The Vendée is a grave. But who is he, this young man?"

The Mother Superior smiled to herself for a moment.

"This young man," she announced finally, "is the son of an old friend, a former benefactress of this convent. A very good lady whom I loved dearly. And so I love him dearly too for her sake and wish only happiness for him. Monsieur le Duc, let me present to you Mr. Jones, from America."

Francis bowed to the duke, and stooped to kiss the thin, pale hand.

Mr. de Colignac left soon after.

"I must go to the d'Aurelles', " he excused himself. "I will return to see you, Reverend Mother, at the first opportunity. Raoul, you are busy now showing Mr. Jones around—perhaps I'll drop in on you this evening. Madame Pauline's on Toulouse Street you say? Mr. Jones, I am honored to have met you. If you are staying at Orleans I hope that I may have the pleasure of showing you some slight attention."

"You are very kind, monsieur." Francis bowed, consumed with a great desire to laugh.

"You must not pay any attention to our Reverend Mother's talk of white uniforms," the duke smiled at him. "In my day I have, of course, worn the white royalist cockade, but now I wear the tricolor like a good citizen. We are all republicans here, is it not so, Mother Superior?"

"God does not trouble himself with cockades!" she remarked. "White or tricolor, they are all the same."

Raoul watched the door close and sank into a chair.

"Whew!" he exclaimed. "I have aged ten years since I came into this room! What magnificent lies I am going to have to tell him tonight! And de Valmy, too. I will never be through doing penance."

"It seems very difficult for me to be a private individual," Francis complained.

"It is always difficult when you try to interfere with destiny," the Mother Superior told him. "It is your destiny to be king of France. The last word has not been spoken."

"The best word of all was spoken in this room," Francis insisted. "You are an angel, Mother Superior."

"Those who serve our desires are always angels!" She pursed her lips. "Now you must go away. Mr. de Vendome will take care of you. You will do well to remain quietly somewhere until all this blows over. When the Americans have come you will have nothing to fear. There is an excellent place on Cathedral Alley, Madame Claude's. Say that I sent you. It will be best for you not to be at Madame Pauline's."

"That young lady—" Raoul was anxious about the girl of the coach—"will she not go around telling people about

us? What if she should see us again? It might be very dangerous."

"Have no fear." The Mother Superior smiled. "She will not dream of telling any one that there were two young gentlemen in her carriage. It would make too great a scandal. I must say one thing." She gazed pointedly at Francis. "If you should ever meet again—after all, it is not impossible; do not smile so, my fine young fellow—you must remember that it is only Mr. Jones that she must meet. She must never in her life meet Charles Louis of France. Do you understand? There, may God protect you, my son."

They thanked her and went out into the darkening afternoon.

At Madame Claude's, in the garnished back room which she was able to provide, there was still so much unsaid between them. All the news of five years; Philadelphia, New York, Greenwich; Mr. Jefferson's election, Theodosia Burr's marriage, Jumel's affair, the death of Roger Moore. Francis was bitterly distressed.

"He must have worried so the night I disappeared," he said finally, shaking his head, "and thought it ungrateful of me to run away. I suppose he believed the message Ducros made me write. Look here, Raoul, I ought to let them know at Moore Mansion. Aunt Abigail must be in all her states about me!"

"You had better not say anything for a while," Raoul advised him. "With a letter the news might leak out and they would hear in Philadelphia. Stay here quietly until everything has calmed down, and then we will see. If you want any money I can supply you."

If he would only get married soon, Raoul was thinking, then they would not be so anxious to find him at Philadelphia. They were looking for a King of France, not a King and Queen! Oh, if they found out, they would still try to persuade him that such a marriage was not valid—those old ones would not hesitate. But Raoul could imagine Francis at such an interview.

"And how is Polly?" Francis asked him suddenly. "Is she married yet?"

"Oh, I hope not!" Raoul cried without thinking, and Francis roared with laughter.

"Oho!" he shouted. "So you are in love! Wait until I tell her how you ride around in coaches with strange young Creole ladies!"

"As to that, monsieur," Raoul reminded him, "you set me a brave example!"

"Shall I ever find her?" Francis was all solemn immediately. "Did you ever in your life see any one like her? I'm not going to leave this place until I've found her!"

"God forbid!" Raoul objected. "I hope she never lays eyes on you again, or me either. The less we have to do with her the better."

"Yes? Well that's too bad," Francis informed him. "I'm going to find her if I have to go and look for her at the arsenal!"

THERE was feasting and dancing in Orleans that night; a tremendous running about of *cocodri* boys; a great curling and powdering of ladies' heads by old Zabet, who boasted that she was free, black and seventy-one. The new Municipal Council was entertaining: the Marigny mansion was ablaze. In the *cabildo* and the Government House Mr. de Boré and his adjuncts were drawing up decrees, poking their noses into the archives of the defunct Cabildo Tribunal. In the Place d'Armes French uniforms tramped back and forth at the foot of the flagpole, the *serenos* were become *gendarmes*, pacing the streets in squads of four with brass-handled cutlasses and black leather cockades on their chapeaux. The Marquis de Casa Calvo went by with his Spanish guard, trying to pretend that nothing had occurred that noon in Toulouse Street to turn him green with rage. At the *comandancia* to which he had been transferred from Fort St. Charles the little *Regidor* who had lost the boy was still protesting, volubly and furiously.

But in Raoul's room at Madame Pauline's there were only three gentlemen sitting dejectedly around a bare table, facing a dismal emergency. From what divergent points of view one may imagine—Raoul, glib with deception, fluent with hypocritical concern, hating himself more with every word that he uttered; Mr. de Colignac, grim and tight-jawed; Mr. de Valmy, on his guard before the big fish from the Vendée, playing his royalist rôle with both lungs, privately cursing the luck which had spoiled his morning's coup.

He had come in answer to Raoul's summons, all in full-dress uniform from the Marigny mansion—very magnificent in white breeches and knee boots, epaulettes and feathered hat, gold-braided tunic and tricolor sash—to find himself face to face with the duke, reciting his false allegiance to the white cockade, discoursing of Mr. de Savenay, whom he had never seen, to this Vendée general who had known him intimately. But the descriptions of the great duke furnished him by the secret police were excellent and this only slightly lesser duke was much engrossed in what Raoul had to say. He accepted Mr. de Valmy with a prompt wave of his hand and turned once more to his godson.

"Tell me this miserable story again," he commanded. "I am all confused."

"Yes," Mr. de Valmy eagerly took this turn in the conversation. "I was looking all over for you, Mr. de Vendome. What were you able to discover?"

Raoul repeated his lies. He had seen the coach stalled in Toulouse Street and he had heard it said that some one was missing from the carriage; he had searched the town. No trace. He had gone to the Ursuline convent thinking to confide in the Mother Superior, but she had a visitor with her from America.

"Same here," Mr. de Valmy added. "I haven't heard a thing. I followed the cavalrymen to Fort St. Charles, then I went back to the boat. I missed you at the blacksmith shop, and here we are!"

The duke slammed his fist down on the table.

"Sacred name!" he cried. "It's enough to break a heart of iron. We have him with us in the Vendée and we fight like wolves against the Blues. Then he dies. Those peasants with whom we had left him show us his grave. Then he turns up again by some trick of de Fersen's in New York. Then he disappears again. Then we learn about *El Niño* and de la Motte writes me it is surely the Dauphin. I come to America to see what can be done. I land this afternoon in Orleans, and what do I find? That at noon on this very day we have lost him again! I can fight armies, but I can not fight for ever against fate. I have grown old lately. Very old."

"God Himself is against us, monsieur!" Mr. de Valmy exclaimed. "We are abandoned. Think of it—we had everything arranged! Another five minutes and he was with us. We were right, there was only one old fool with him, we could not have failed. We would have had him for you now at the Balise—of course we would not have known that you were here, but I mean the thing was done. It's heartbreaking."

There were tears in his eyes, very genuine tears of spite, but the sight of them stung Raoul's own unsuspecting eyes. The gay de Valmy who had prepared everything so well. It was despicable to deceive him, more so almost than to trick the duke who had had the Dauphin in front of him for half an hour and never realized it, while he talked imprudently of the Vendée. The pathetic old duke, staring at the wall. He looked old, all of a sudden, collapsed, defeated. Raoul was intolerably ashamed of himself.

"Cheer up, Raoul," the duke said to him after a while. "It's not your fault. You've done your best. If you knew where to find him you'd not be sitting there. It was a very brave thing that you and Mr. de Valmy tried to do this morning. You are both of you worthy of the names you bear. I'm proud of you, my boy."

"Oh, don't!" Raoul begged him, squirming in his seat.

It was bad enough to have to lie to

him, to turn traitor, in front of those two loyal souls, to the cause which he was pretending to serve, without having to listen to his godfather's praise. And always Mr. de Valmy's disappointment hurt him more than the older man's dismay. His comrade de Valmy—it was like knifing him in the back. Mr. de Colignac was the figurehead, the symbol of everything which the Dauphin had determined to avoid and put away from him, but de Valmy was the friend, the companion of the forlorn hope at whose shoulder he had been prepared to die.

Poor Raoul! If only at that moment he could have seen into the mind of Mr. de Valmy, the comrade, the friend, the companion of the forlorn hope—Mr. de Valmy, Number Seventeen, special agent of the secret police, American section!

"What is there that we can do?" Raoul asked the duke, since he must simulate zeal.

"Nothing at present," Mr. de Colignac decided. "Watch, listen, inquire along the waterfront. He may have gotten away up river to the Germans' Coast, or beyond to the Acadians'. We must wait. I shall now of course remain at Orleans in case something turns up."

"Where do you stay, monsieur?" Mr. de Valmy inquired. He must watch this big fish but leave him at large for the time being. The more of them looking for the Dauphin the better.

"My little cousin Martinique d'Aurelle has taken me in," the duke explained. "I shall stay with them on Bourbon Street, at least until she goes north with Madame de Lassy."

"A charming young person," Mr. de Valmy smiled. "I have the honor of a slight acquaintance. Dominique Bouligny presented me, or else I do not think that the personal aide of the Colonial Prefect of the Republic would have fared so well!"

"The d'Aurelles have always been very royalist," Mr. de Colignac admitted. "If one can say such a thing, I think that Niquette carries it to extremes. Women are that way, always in a blaze. Before you know it they go flying into nunneries. Now nunneries are all very well, except that you can't get out of them!"

Nunneries and coaches! Raoul nearly laughed aloud.

"Now with us," Mr. de Colignac continued, "we have more philosophy. Life, war, politics, it is a great game after all. We take our sides and play with our lives. The king is in, we keep him there, the king is out, we put him back—if we can find him! We are prepared to die for these things, we sacrifice everything to them, but when the game is over if we have not died playing it we are content to live, to make our adjustments. But with women the game is never over."

"Women are more loyal than men," Raoul suggested.

"Oh, no doubt of it," the duke agreed. "We put cockades on our hats and change them whenever it suits us. A woman puts a cockade in her heart and keeps it there forever."

"I should like to be Mademoiselle Martinique's cockade then!" Mr. de Valmy exclaimed.

"Bah!" Raoul accused him. "You, the lion of Orleans! You're just like all the other young bucks. I'll wager you leave her *bredouille* fast enough in her chair against the wall at the Salle Condé as soon as Bernard Marigny comes for you to go to the quadroon ball!"

"No, seriously," Mr. de Valmy defended himself. "I stayed through three whole waltzes the other evening. I was almost the only young man left in the room. I grant you that finally the sight of so many wall flowers doing tapestry terrified me!"

"What devotion!" the Duke laughed. "I'll put in a good word for you, my boy."

"Oh, no," Mr. de Valmy insisted. "The drummer-boy fights his own battles!"

ONE week, two weeks. Francis stayed quietly at Madame Claude's nursing an imaginary fever. Mr. de Valmy was very busy attending Madame de Laussat in her last official days. Raoul paid stealthy visits to Mr. Jones, when he

was not pretending to be searching for him. Mr. de Colignac came every evening to Toulouse Street and shook his head.

*I did not leave Orleans after all,* Raoul wrote to Polly. *A gentleman has arrived from France who commands my presence. Shall I ever see you again?*

From Greenwich there were no letters.

The town screwed up its courage against the coming of the Americans. Treat them decently, Bernard Marigny kept saying; one must not judge by the Kentuckians and leather-shirts; the civilized Americans were good fellows; that President Jefferson was a great man. Still, Mr. de Boré would not serve as mayor under them. Let them come first, and the Creoles would see. And no bending of the neck to placate them! Chins up and hats on! Let the new proprietors take possession—the heart of the *Vieux Carré* had not been sold with the islets.

On December 17 they were two miles away. Some troops and the commissioners—the new Governor Claiborne and General Wilkinson, the one who had held a tobacco trade concession with Daniel Clark under the Spaniards. They sent in to say that they were there and Mr. de Laussat dispatched his aide with a carriage to fetch them. Fort St. Charles blazed nineteen guns as they clattered through with their escort of Mississippi volunteer horse. The next day the French officials returned the call, with double the escort. The ceremony was set for Tuesday, December 20. The Americans in town were beginning to spit tobacco juice more freely on the *banquettes.*

"They are superb, the American commissioners," Mr. de Valmy told Raoul. "In the first place, they do not speak a word of French. You will admit that that is extremely intelligent! You should hear de Laussat on the subject. He says Claiborne possesses estimable private qualities, but very little capacity for his place. An awkward *bourgeois.* As for the fat general, de Laussat calls him flighty and rattle-headed. A pompous balloon from what I saw of him. It will be a brilliant administration, just wait and see!"

But Raoul was much more worried about Mr. Jones, for on the morning of the transfer Francis was to risk the streets.

"At noon on Tuesday," he informed Raoul, "Louisiana becomes American and nobody can touch me. You don't think I'm going to stay in this room all the rest of my life, do you? From Tuesday on I'm a free man, and I'm going to start looking for that girl!"

"*Miséricorde!*" Raoul groaned.

A beautiful clear day, the Place d'Armes packed again, the balconies jammed. The French militia drawn up along one side of the square, the guard of honor at attention under the flagpole, a general to-do at the *cabildo.* Everywhere a great silence. The Americans were at the Tchoupitoulas Gate exchanging military courtesies with the grenadier sentries.

"Keep still!" Raoul begged Francis. "Don't carry on so."

"I don't see her anywhere," Francis complained, standing on his toes behind the soldiers.

Drums, suddenly, American drums. Fort St. Charles began to salute. There they were, entering the Place d'Armes—the commissioners on horseback, red-coated dragoons, artillery, infantry, carabineers.

"*Les Américains!*"

If anybody cheered the music drowned it out.

The troops lined up, facing the French; the commissioners passed into the *cabildo.* An American officer was at the flagpole, busy with the extra halliards. Francis was squirming about, scanning the galleries, treading on people's heels. The commissioners came out on the balcony of the *cabildo.*

The French flag quivered, began to drop, the American flag was going up to meet it. Half way they stopped, and a

single gun sent its signal to the ships and batteries. The French flag sank, red, white, blue; the sergeant of the guard of honor gathered it reverently in his arms; the American flag continued its slow ascent. A group of Americans waved their hats and yelled, accentuating the Creole silence. Then they too were silent. The American flag had stuck. For an instant it would not go up.

The silence rising from that grieving multitude seemed to cling to it, holding it back. On all sides people were weeping. It was at that moment, at the very midnight blackness of that silence, that Francis exploded, filling the Place d'Armes with outcries.

"There she is!" he shouted. "I see her! Over there on the cathedral steps!"

"Are you mad!" Raoul grabbed him by the arm and pulled him away down Chartres Street.

"Let me go!" Francis was struggling with him. "Let me go—Mr. de Vendome, I command you to let me go! You forget who I am!"

Raoul shoved him along ahead of him.

"I forget nothing," he told his furious Dauphin. "You are Mr. Jones and I command you to shut up! Have you no sense at all? You big fool!"

It was not every one, Raoul recorded later, who had had the distinction of calling the King of France a big fool.

Raoul dragged him to Madame Pauline's and pushed him into his room.

"There, cool off!" he advised him, and sat down in front of the door.

It would have to be settled once and for all, Raoul was thinking. There must be no more of these royal outbursts. Francis must learn to preserve his new identity or there would be trouble all the time.

"If you do that again, monsieur, I will tell Mr. de Colignac who you are," Raoul warned him. "All right, sulk!"

Francis drummed his heels against the bed for a while.

"Did you see her?" He grinned suddenly. "All in white? She's perfectly beautiful, Raoul! There's no one in the world like her!"

"Very likely." Raoul laughed. "Of course I have my own prejudices."

They had some lunch served to them, and with the coffee Mr. de Colignac was at the door.

"Ah, Monsieur Jones!" he smiled. "From America. Well, now you are on your native soil again. Permit me to offer you my regretful congratulations!"

The duke was glad to find them both. He had arranged something—they were to dine with him that evening at the d'Aurelles. To celebrate the occasion. Mr. de Vendome from France and Mr. Jones from America! Was it not an excellent idea? They thought it was a terrible idea, but they could not tell him so and he went away very pleased with himself.

"It will be horrible," Francis insisted. "Why did we accept? I don't want to see his little Martinique! Can you imagine inviting an American to dinner in a Creole house on a day like this! I may be a big fool, Mr. de Vendome, but I would not have done that."

"It is only when you try to behave like the town crier that you are a big fool, Mr. Jones!" Raoul did not hesitate to retort.

They were in excellent humor.

A little before the dinner hour they presented themselves at the columned doorway of the house in Bourbon Street. A lovely doorway surmounted by a fanlight, opening on to a wide hall leading to the brass newel post of a circular stairway. They were ushered into a parlor. The duke was there, and a girl. Raoul saw her first, and accepted his doom.

"You can get in but you can't get out!" he whispered to Francis, and shoved him forward toward the girl of the coach.

## CHAPTER XIV

### DRUMS AND DAGGERS

THE duke was at his introductions—a long rigmarole about France and America, his cousin Martinique d'Aurelle, his godson Raoul de Vendome and his

young friend Monsieur Jones. Francis was standing with his mouth open, crimson with embarrassment now that he had his wish; Raoul was wondering whether he looked as idiotic as he felt. The girl stared at the two young men. She was all in white again, high-waisted and low-necked, her brown curls shining under the chandelier. How much of the utterly sinister expression in her eyes was anger, how much dismay, Raoul could not be certain.

They bowed over her hand. If the duke had not been so busy talking himself he might have noticed that so far not one of his young people had said a word.

It could not last forever. Raoul turned to his godfather and engaged him in loud, unintelligent conversation concerning the day's ceremonies. Behind the duke's back he saw Francis take a step toward Martinique, his face a written page of entreaty.

The girl shrank a little from his approach. In the same breath the two of them raised an anxious finger to their lips. For a moment, at least, the bond of a mutual connivance united them.

"Have you been long in Orleans, monsieur?" Martinique found her voice at last.

"Three weeks precisely," Francis replied.

"And how do you like it, monsieur?" Martinique was asking all the proper questions now.

"Mademoiselle, it has completely won my heart," Francis assured her.

"I am glad that you approve of your purchase, monsieur." She was the girl of the coach again.

"Mademoiselle, I was not referring to bricks and plaster," he reminded her. "It is something else in Orleans which has won my heart. Something very beautiful, very kind and generous, amazingly courageous. But very cruel, too, I am afraid. Very proud and unforgiving."

"And what is that?" she inquired imprudently.

"Mademoiselle, I think perhaps it represents the soul of Orleans. I have a picture of it in my mind ever since the first day."

"Ever since the first day?"

"Yes—the picture of a girl I saw getting out of a coach," he told her.

Martinique laughed a cascade of little silvery provocations.

"And I will tell you a picture that I have." She threw him the words lazily in her soft Creole voice. "The picture of an American, one of the first that I had seen. He came for a few moments by chance into my presence and because I gave him an inch of courtesy he took a mile for granted. Perhaps that picture represents the soul of America!"

They went in to dinner.

It was probably an excellent dinner, served with all the elegance of family silver and old French china under another chandelier illuminating the wall frescoes painted on canvas, the Louis XV furniture salvaged from Santo Domingo, the brass mountings of candlesticks and girandoles; garnished with appetizers and condiments centered around a great dish of *gombo févi*—chicken and ham and shrimps, all mixed up with okra and onions, rice and red peppers, cooled with Malaga and Bordeaux; as a specialty, something from the island of Martinique, baked potatoes stuffed with pineapple, and just a touch of Antigua rum.

But Raoul did not remember the dinner except as a mechanical process of serving and swallowing. He was too much overcome by the bleak severity with which his hostess inspired the dismal entertainment. Just the four of them, since the aunt did not appear. Fortunately the duke had a great deal to say, and regaled them with a long account of the removal of the French flag after its descent from the flagpole—how the guard of honor had escorted it to the Government House, and how every one had stood bareheaded at its passage, and how the American troops had presented arms. How touching, and how stirring, and how this, that and the other. "A description of the corpse at a funeral would have been just as cheerful," Raoul wrote afterward.

Otherwise the conversation was not brilliant. Raoul was taking no chances

with the young lady's tongue. Francis seemed to have swallowed his own after the rebuke which he had received in the parlor. Martinique herself was being just as disagreeable as possible to her supposedly American guest, asking the most ingenuously disparaging questions about America, deploring the necessity of her approaching journey to New York with Madame de Lassy—as if she were not actually pining to go, as the duke had already informed Raoul—pouring the oil of an impenetrable indifference to his presence upon the fires of Francis's breathless response to her own.

"May I hope to see you again, mademoiselle?" Raoul heard him ask her when they were leaving.

"It is possible that we may meet at one of the public balls, monsieur." She completely demolished him with her gracious brutality.

"How many miles of patience must one go for another inch of your courtesy, mademoiselle?" he nevertheless had the gimp to inquire.

"More than even you take for granted, monsieur!"

No, it was not a successful evening.

A few days later—perhaps less than he had originally intended, more than Martinique may have anticipated—Francis went to Bourbon Street to pay his "visit of digestion." Raoul had already performed his duty at a time when he knew that his godfather would be there.

The *gardienne* took Francis through the massive, heavily upholstered obscurity of the house into the soft, green half-lights of the inner court. There was a basin with a fountain in the *parterre*, a climbing of vines to second-story balconies, ornamental urns in the arcade, a frequent fluttering of doves. Martinique was there, sitting beside an elderly lady who did not move in her big chair.

"My aunt, monsieur," she explained. "*Ma Tante*, this is Monsieur Jones, a friend of cousin de Colignac's."

Martinique was as undemonstrative as a weather vane on a windless day. The elderly lady could not shake hands; her eyes were not especially welcoming. They were not exactly cordial, the d'Aurelle eyes, young or old, Francis reported to Raoul later.

"Considering that I am not really American at all," he complained to his friend, "the hostility of some of these *ancien régime* Creoles against America which I am forced to swallow begins to annoy me!"

On the farther side of the elderly lady a young gentleman had risen to his feet. A very elegant young gentleman indeed, who looked at Francis without enthusiasm.

"Permit me," Martinique presented them to each other. "Mr. de Valmy—Mr. Jones."

Mr. de Valmy was enchanted, Mr. Jones was charmed. They sat down on it, and stared at the pigeons. So there was the famous de Valmy who had done his best to rescue him from the Spaniards, Francis was thinking.

"I got the impression, however," he told Raoul, "that he would not have stirred a finger to rescue Mr. Jones from immediate annihilation!"

Mr. de Valmy had glanced him up and down and found him unimportant. The young American acquaintance of the big fish, he notified Paris. A person of no apparent consequence, presentable but not exciting. So Number Seventeen disposed of Francis Jones.

"Mr. de Valmy was telling us about his experiences," Martinique immediately restored the subject which Francis had evidently interrupted. Mr. de Valmy had the floor, the *parterre* and the entire courtyard.

"As I was saying," he declaimed, "I was only twelve when they gave me a drum and took me across the Rhine with Hoche. Then to Egypt with Bonaparte. Ah, mademoiselle, those were great days, the Pyramids, the Nile! He swept everything before him while we boys drummed!"

"Oh, tell us about it!" Martinique exclaimed. "That must have been wonderful. Egypt! Think of it, Mr. Jones!"

Francis thought of it, without emotion.

"Well, one campaign was just like another," Mr. de Valmy laughed. "In Egypt Bonaparte made a speech about the Pyramids! That is all I remember."

"And you ran away from home to do all that!" Martinique was apparently giddy with admiration.

"Yes, mademoiselle, I was a child of the camps," Mr. de Valmy sighed. "My boyhood was spent in the rough school of the armies. My drum and my wits!"

"And your courage!" she did not fail to remind him, and denied his deprecating gesture.

The thing went on for some time. He had been there half an hour or more, Francis realized, without saying a word. And it was not as if he did not have a story of his own to tell!

"Well, mademoiselle, I happen to be the King of France!"

What if he should suddenly make that not insignificant announcement?

But no. It was not enough. The drummer boy would still have the advantage of him. Charles Louis Capet, Francis Vincent, had done nothing all his life except ride in coaches. The other fellow had stood on his own two dusty feet and drummed his way to glory. The King of France was already defeated in these lists. It was for Francis Jones to take up the challenge.

"And even Francis Jones began his life in a coach!" Francis remarked later to Raoul.

He got up to leave. He was not going to sit there in front of de Valmy any longer and be ignored. He bowed to the company and looked at Martinique.

"I will make my *adieux*, mademoiselle," he told her. "You will be embarking soon for the north, and I may not remain much longer in Orleans. I can not find words to thank you for your kindness. Good-by.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and her big round eyes were entirely his for once. "Oh! Good-by, monsieur!"

He turned away immediately to the house. His knees were trembling; what had he done now? Slammed the door on his nose to spite his face? He kept his head straight on his shoulders, but his footsteps through the dark hall were a funeral march. Slower and slower. He was almost at the front door when there was a rustling behind him.

"Oh!" he heard her say. "You have found your way, monsieur! I came to see—it was not polite of me not to accompany you—"

"I was not expecting you to come, mademoiselle," he lied to her very humbly.

Martinique's hands were little fluttering signals of distress.

"I must return at once to my aunt," she reminded him. "Do you really leave Orleans so soon, monsieur? Are you already in such haste to go?"

"On the contrary, mademoiselle, but—"

"But?"

"I thought that I had already stayed too long!"

"Oh, monsieur, such a little while only!"

She went flitting down the hall out of sight, away from the sudden nearness of his own restless hands.

"Yes," Raoul decided, when these matters were jubilantly laid before him. "That is all very fine. But she will make you pay for it! She will lead you a pretty dance for having startled her out of her pose!"

And Raoul was not at all sure that Francis had told him the whole story. Perhaps she had not run away quite so fast at the end. In which case the dance would be all the prettier! Still, it would be a dance, whereas his own affair had become a miserable *pas seul*.

Raoul was not mistaken. After her little spontaneous pursuit of him into the hall that afternoon, Martinique proceeded to treat Francis like a withered stalk of broccoli. The young man was consequently about as companionable as an alligator. They saw each other quite often now, Martinique and Francis, at balls and private entertainments which Raoul could not longer prevent him from

frequenting—in spite of the danger from the Marquis de Casa Calvo's continued sojourn at Orleans—and at the house on Bourbon Street. Mr. de Colignac was an excuse, and the aunt seemed to have made up her mind to it that the American Jones was no more objectionable a suitor than the republican de Valmy.

And Mr. de Valmy was almost always there, or else on the point of arriving, or just that moment departed.

"I was a child of the camps!" Francis gave bitter imitations to Raoul of his rival's declamations. "My boyhood was spent in the rough school of the armies! My drum and my wits! Why doesn't he go back to France with his —— drum? His job is finished in Orleans."

"You forget," Raoul reminded him. "We are all sitting here looking for you! I'd like very much to go to New York myself, but Mr. de Colignac keeps saying something may turn up. And you, monsieur, are you going to stay here forever?"

"I certainly am," Francis informed him. "I'm going to take lessons on the drum! Martinique won't listen to anything else, apparently—"

"Something should be done about the Moores." Raoul tried to entice him into a discussion of his neglected affairs. "And about your estate of Brook Field?"

"They can all go to the ——!" Francis announced.

In Martinique's presence he behaved like an angry wasp, flying about her and buzzing in her ear with a persistence which her unchanging determination to brush him aside only fortified and increased.

"How long do you remain in Orleans?" she kept asking him. "Have you no home in America, monsieur?"

"We are in America," he told her one day, "and I propose to remain here as long as I please!"

"Oh, it is solely a question of your pleasure," she retorted. "Not anybody else's!"

When these incidents occurred before the others, Francis usually lost his temper, and scowled and sulked and got red in the face. The Lord only knew what they said to each other in private. She was a perfect devil of sarcasm, the little Niquette, but Francis had his ways of hurting her too. There was steel in those blue eyes when he chose, and a sharp blade on his tongue.

"I have never known two people who make me more uncomfortable," Raoul complained to him. "When you and Martinique are together the air is full of daggers!"

"It's this everlasting public exhibition," Francis sighed. "Balls, dinners, boxes at the comedy! She gets furious when I make love to her before everybody, but how the —— can I help it! And then we both get into a state. If we could only go and sit quietly somewhere under a tree by ourselves and behave like human beings just once!"

"In an orchard!" Raoul smiled to himself.

"In an orchard, under a *papegai* pole, it doesn't matter where," Francis insisted. "But this perpetual *charivari* is maddening. I don't know how de Valmy likes it, but we might just as well have the whole town beating tin pans around us all the time. God, I'm unhappy!"

"You can get in but you can't get out!" Raoul could not resist the gibe.

When Francis and Martinique were together the air was full of daggers, and when he and Mr. de Valmy came face to face the room was full of icicles. It gave Raoul the grins when he thought of what de Valmy would say if he were to discover that he was cutting out the King of France. For it was beginning to look that way, although Raoul was not yet prepared to put up his money on the drummer boy. With a girl like Martinique there was no telling. She was playing them both against each other and Mr. de Valmy himself was none too confident.

"He is always there, the American," he told Raoul. "She treats him like the dirt under her feet but he always comes back."

"And you, how does she treat you?" Raoul inquired.

"Frankly, when all is said and done, like a piece of furniture!" Mr. de Valmy frowned. "I don't know what to think."

No, Raoul was not yet prepared to put his money up on the drummer boy. But in the meantime the two young bucks were treating each other with an exaggeration of politeness, an elaboration of courtesy which had in them as much sincerity and good will as a dish full of poison. One of these days something disagreeable would happen. Raoul became really convinced of it one evening at the quadroon ball.

"It will entertain you," he had persuaded Francis who was especially in the dumps that day. "You should see one. The girls are all free quadroons, and none of their men are allowed inside the place. Only white gentlemen."

"But what is it, this ball?" Francis wanted to know. "A mixed dance hall where you go and sport?"

"Far from it!" Raoul exclaimed. "The quadroon balls are eminently respectable. The girls are extremely well bred, they dress superbly, many of them are very well educated, some of them are enormously rich. Many people will tell you that the quadroon balls are more decorous than the white public balls, and infinitely more diverting."

There were certainly more gentlemen present than at most of the Creole balls at such a late hour. That was the trouble, from the point of view of the Creole ladies—they were soon left *bredouille*, as they said, at their own balls while the gentlemen betook themselves to the greater attraction of the quadroon soiree. And the quadroon girls were incontestably magnificent—graceful, elegant, beautifully gowned, resplendent with diamonds, rigorously correct under the eyes of their watching mothers. And white, to all appearances entirely white, fair complexioned so that one had to look twice at the intensely black hair and eyes. Of course, underlying it all, the realization that what the mothers were so eagerly watching was some evidence of interest on the part of a gentleman, and the possibility of a "union" for the daughter with a white "friend."

The two young men danced once or twice, until Francis ran into Mr. de Valmy.

"Monsieur."

"Monsieur."

The greeting froze on their carefully smiling lips, and Raoul watched them anxiously.

"Monsieur amuses himself this evening," Mr. de Valmy remarked. "I had not expected to see you here."

"It is true," Francis replied, "that I am not a habitué of the quadroon ball."

"Do you infer, monsieur, that I spend too much time in this company?" Mr. de Valmy's smile was like a row of bayonets.

"Where you spend your time, monsieur, is naturally of no concern to me," Francis's bayonets clashed with the others.

"Ah! I had thought otherwise! My mistake, monsieur!" Mr. de Valmy bowed.

"The fault is surely mine for my ungracious lack of interest, monsieur!" Francis's bow was no less profound.

Raoul was glad to see them separate. This sort of thing might end badly. He took Francis home without noticing the Marquis de Casa Calvo in a group of other gentlemen. But the Marquis de Casa Calvo noticed him and his companion and wrote at once about it to the Council of the Indies. "I could not be positive as they went out of the door," he reported, "but I could swear that the young one was *El Niño*."

## CHAPTER XV

### BLOOD ROYAL

NEW YEAR'S DAY and *souhaits*, January and carnival time, masked balls at the St. Pierre Theater and in the Salle d'Orleans. A great surface gaiety masking the simmering resentments of a deepening hostility. The Americans! The new proprietors swaggering up and down the *banquettes*. The American language, the American laws,

the American customs rammed down stiff Creole necks; the abrupt autocratic tactlessness of it all; this governor, this fat, alcoholic general, who spoke no French; and the loud-mouthed, humiliating arrogance of the tobacco-spitting Yankee newcomers.

"The dirty-shirts!"

Every Creole gorge was risen, every ounce of Creole pride was eternally offended. Bernard Marigny might serve all he pleased on General Wilkinson's staff—in the streets, in the cafés, at the balls, Creole canes broke American heads; American knuckles smashed Creole faces. There were a hundred fights a day on every corner because the Creoles maintained that the famous illegal purchase was only a diplomatic farce, and that Louisiana would soon be restored to France, if not to Spain; a hundred scuffles an evening at every public entertainment—knife, fist and boot fights, while the ladies held their ears in the corner—when the Americans insisted on dancing their abominable reels and jigs.

"Let them go to Congo Square and dance the *bamboula!*"

The thing was become symbolic. France and America, cotillions or reels, waltzes or jigs? It was all very well for the authorities to issue alternating programs of dances and to place *gendarmes* in the ballrooms to enforce them. When the orchestra tried to play the wrong music American feet began stamping on the triple cypress dance floor of the Salle d'Orleans, Creole catcalls drowned out the hateful cadences in the Salle Condé. Ladies flew to the doorways, trays of sugared water and orange flower syrup went crashing, swords came flashing out, hands fell stinging across flushed cheeks.

Inevitably, Francis was with the Americans, Mr. de Valmy for the Creoles. Martinique waltzed through the uproar. Mr. de Valmy took all the waltzes. Martinique did not dance the *ril* and the *jigue*. Francis was left *bredouille* and "did tapestry." Bad blood was stirring.

It all came to a boil one evening at the Salle Condé. General Wilkinson was to be there, every one was to be there—except Raoul, who heard about it later—every one with lead in his glove. It was to be a decisive battle. Waltzes or jigs?

The riot began with the music for the first jig. A tumult of hissing and shouting, of chairs pounded on the floor, a perfect *charivari* of stamping and yelling, with the two camps mustering for violence and bloodshed. Suddenly in the midst of it all silence, and a girl on a chair. It was Martinique.

"Tell the Americans," she cried in French, "that for nearly forty years Orleans was Spanish, and still they did not force us to dance the *fandango*. The Americans have not been here forty days and they insist on making us dance the jig. Well, we will not dance their sacred jig! We will not dance it, and we will not watch it danced. And that is all, *Monsieur le Général!*"

Thunders of applause and again silence. The general had climbed perilously on another chair. Bernard Marigny was translating for him.

"It shall never be said," the general proclaimed, "that Americans are less chivalrous than the Dons. Tell the lady that her slightest wish is our law. Musicians, strike up a waltz! Gentlemen, choose your partners!"

"Bravo! Bravo!" The general had his moments after all.

Francis and Mr. de Valmy came sliding across the floor together to Martinique's side. Francis was there first by a good eyelash. The general was lumbering up behind.

"Mademoiselle!" each of the young men claimed her attention. "Will you do me the honor?"

"Which of you is first, messieurs?" she inquired, most punctiliously.

"I am so fortunate," Francis assured her.

"Perhaps monsieur is first," Mr. de Valmy admitted. "But I will leave it to your choice, mademoiselle, whether we shall not dance the waltz of victory together!"

He seemed quite confident of her decision. Francis lost his temper.

"Your victories are easily won, monsieur," he remarked. "For the waltz you may thank the Americans. Must you also depend on their charity for a partner? I have a prior claim."

"Oh!" Martinique mocked him with her silvery laughter. "If it is a question of claims I think perhaps that General Wilkinson has an even better claim!"

And she turned away on the general's arm, the little Niquette, with her most gracious smile, knowing perfectly well what was taking place behind her. It happened like that, in an instant, without any fuss.

"Do you depend only on your tongue for your victories, monsieur?" Mr. de Valmy asked Francis, and flicked him with his glove.

"Swords, monsieur," Francis replied. "On the levee near the arcades, in half an hour. No seconds."

"At your service, monsieur."

They bowed meticulously to each other and left the ballroom. Martinique saw them over her shoulder, and began to waltz a little clumsily with the garrulous general. The piper must now be paid for the pretty dancing which she had been leading all these days.

RAOUL was late starting for the ball. He had been out to the American ship in the stream to put a letter for Polly aboard before the vessel sailed in an hour or two. Another of his long fruitless epistles to that silent young lady. And as he was crossing the Place d'Armes afterward he ran into old Zabet. She had given up hairdressing since the American transfer, and taken to selling *pralines* on the steps of the cathedral and wandering about the Place d'Armes in the evening talking to every one.

"Philosophic Zabet" she was called, because of her amusing comments on the affairs of the town. Everybody chatted with her, she was a public pet, an institution, old as years, she knew everything that went on from Congo Square to the river. Now she stopped Raoul and peered at him. It was difficult to understand her chattering gombo.

"What is it, Zabet?" he tried to make out. "What are you saying? Not so fast!"

He began to get it. The Salle Condé, Cathedral Alley, an ambush, the Spaniards. After the ball.

"The who?"

The Spaniards. Zabet had heard. Zabet knew everything, *bon djé!* Yes, the Spaniards were concocting something. They had the evil eye, the Spaniards.

"But why do you tell me all this?" Raoul was anxious to discover how much she knew.

*Sacré roucht!* Did he not live in Cathedral Alley, the young gentleman, the friend of monsieur? They were not so clever, the Spaniards! All this time he had been there, and they had only just found him.

"Found him—what do you mean?" Raoul pretended not to know. "Why should they want to find him?"

Zabet cackled with laughter. *Bon djé!* It did not take three eyes to recognize him. He was not a *farfadet*, a ghost, the young man who had come tumbling out of the Spanish coach in front of her that day on Toulouse Street. *Hé, hé!* How he had run, the poor young man!

"*Miséricorde!* You knew all the time?" Raoul exclaimed.

Surely, Zabet knew. She knew everything, *hé, hé!* If she were to tell all she knew about everybody in Orleans, *sacré roucht!* She was glad he had escaped, whoever he was! They had the evil eye, the Spaniards. That O'Reilly the Bloody and his murders! But now the Spaniards were concocting something, and she was telling monsieur. She had gone all the way to Ma'm' Pauline's but he was out. Well, now he knew. They had the evil eye, the Spaniards.

Raoul gave her enough to pay for a whole year's worth of *pralines* and ran with all his legs to the Salle Condé.

Raoul had only one idea in his mind.

To find Francis, to drag him away from the ball, to get him aboard that American ship immediately. He had his argument all ready too. If Martinique ever discovered that Francis was not Mr. Jones the dance between them was over. If Francis refused to come Raoul would threaten to tell Martinique. By gad, he would tell her! The Dauphin must not fall into Spanish hands again. There were limits to Raoul's connivance with Francis. Against the old ones at Philadelphia, yes, the Dauphin had a right to choose; but when it came to the Spaniards, the Vendée was better than that.

But Francis was not at the ball. Raoul looked everywhere for him, no Francis. And Mr. de Valmy was not at the ball. Surely they had not gone to the quadroon ball! No, it was not the right night. And Martinique herself was not at the ball. Raoul could not find anybody.

A gentleman hailed him. It was Bernard Marigny.

"Have you seen Mademoiselle d'Aurelle?" Raoul asked him.

"Not for some time. I think she went home. She was complaining of a headache."

"I was looking for Mr. Jones too. What's become of him, do you know?"

"Ask no questions!" Bernard Marigny laughed.

"What do you mean, ask no questions? I want to find him."

"Well, of course I'm not certain, but I think you'd better look under the nearest *fanal!*" the other advised him.

"You don't mean—"

"Yes, that's what they're saying. On the levee probably. No seconds, I understand. He and de Valmy."

Raoul went tearing out of the room.

Back to the Place d'Armes, down to the levee. Which way? There was a *fanal* at the entrance to the new butcher stalls, above the arch. There, perhaps! Plenty of light and the arcade would conceal them. Raoul flew down the deserted roadway in a sweat of anxiety.

Francis and de Valmy—and he had seen it coming too! Could anything be more disastrous! If Raoul could have laid hands on Martinique just then he would have wrung her precious little neck. It was her fault, playing with them all this time, inflaming them against each other! Now they were out here somewhere, lunging at one another for the sake of her pretty brown eyes. And what was she doing? She had gone home with a headache, the darling little Niquette! She would hear about it in the morning, and be so surprized, so distressed! And so flattered! Women were fearful savages. Still, if one of them were badly hurt, if one of them were killed—*épée* duels in Orleans were serious affairs, especially when there were no seconds present to prevent the principals from massacring each other—if one of them were killed Martinique might not be so gay. There was one of them who mattered; perhaps she herself would not find out which one until it was too late.

But to Raoul there was one of them who mattered already so much more than the other. He was very fond of de Valmy, but Francis was the Dauphin! None of this would be happening if Raoul had not lied about him. After all, he was really the one to blame.

They were there under the *fanal*, stripped of their coats and waistcoats, white-shirted against the shadows. On de Valmy's right sleeve there was a sop of red. They were at it furiously, pressing each other thrust and parry, their bodies tense, the left hands out behind, their feet a swift intricacy of shifting steps. The swords flashed cold, ringing out deadly chimes. The Spaniards had neglected no feature of Francis's education—he fenced beautifully.

Raoul completely lost his head.

"Stop it!" he shouted, rushing up to them. "For ——'s sake, de Valmy—It's the Dauphin! Do you hear? You're fighting with the Dauphin!"

"Shut up, you —— idiot!"

Francis turned his head an instant in a rage at Raoul— Mr. de Valmy had already started to lunge for a thrust—before de Valmy could check himself Francis

had the point of the blade in his left shoulder.

"*Misérable!*" Mr. de Valmy cried. "You've made me foul him!"

Francis staggered a little.

"Ah!" he sighed, as he sank away slowly from the crimson steel. "*Touché!*"

Raoul was clawing at de Valmy with both hands.

"Don't you understand, he's *El Niño!* I lied to you. He didn't ever want any one to know. It's the Dauphin!"

"And I've killed him!" Mr. de Valmy smashed his *épée* against the arcade. Number Seventeen's instructions were to get the boy alive!

They fell on their knees beside the Dauphin, propping up his head, tearing away his bloody linen, chattering like frightened macaws.

"Monsieur! monsieur! Are you badly hurt—the thrust was foul—where are you touched, monsieur?"

"Monsieur, the Spaniards have found out—that's why I came! You must let us take you away at once!"

Francis opened his eyes and looked at Raoul.

"Who's the big fool now?" he asked him, and lost consciousness.

THEY were whispering to each other, Raoul and de Valmy, while they dressed the wound, and Martinique could not hear.

For the little Niquette had not gone home with a headache, one learns. She had slipped out of the Salle Condé with only her maid, and gone straight to the levee. To the arcades, she explained afterward. The *cocodri* boys all knew where, the maid had soon found out. Arrangements for a duel could never be kept secret five minutes in Orleans where young bloods thought nothing sometimes of fighting openly on the *banquettes*.

She was there all the time behind one of the pillars. The maid had been told to wait at the other end and hold her tongue. Martinique was there, a little ghost in the shadows, come to find out perhaps which one of the two it was who mattered.

She saw them remove their coats, watched them stand out under the *fanal* for the salute of ceremony, witnessed the first cautious passes and the gradual acceleration of their sword play. Suddenly she knew that Mr. de Valmy was hurt. She stared at the blood on his sleeve. It was not Mr. de Valmy who mattered. It was the other. Martinique knew that she was pushing home with him every lunge, parrying for him every attack. She was fighting with him with all her soul, hating the adversary, adoring the chosen victor in a passion of terror and yearning. And then Mr. de Vendome—

Martinique heard his terrible words, received in her own breast the fatal thrust.

"He's *El Niño*! I lied to you. He didn't ever want any one to know. It's the Dauphin!"

Martinique was almost out of her senses with fear. If it had been only Mr. Jones she would have rushed out in front of them and gone to him. But those words of Mr. de Vendome's imprisoned her, paralyzed her, froze her with fearful dismay. She understood, although perhaps not quite fully, what Mr. Jones had done. She never doubted his honor. He had flung away his name and his rank, she saw, rid himself permanently of their impediment to him in her presence. Martinique adored him all the more for it. But he must not.

He was the Dauphin, the King of France, he had no right to renounce the heritage of God's anointing grace. She must not accept the offer of this sacrifice. She must give him back to France.

Martinique aroused her maid and flew home. At the house she went immediately to knock at Mr. de Colignac's door.

"Cousin Armand!" she called to him. "Come at once! On His Majesty's service!"

## CHAPTER XVI

### COCK AND BULL

"HE MUST leave Orleans at once," Raoul kept saying. "He won't be safe here a moment from the Spaniards."

Mr. de Valmy, in both his pretended royalist and his police agent capacities, was agreed to that. They carried him off, slowly, with careful steps, wrapped in his cloak, the hands trailing. Down the levee to the boat landing, with pains into a skiff, out to the American ship. A brawl with the Creoles, they explained to the captain, and arrest threatening. Mr. Jones must be kept aboard at all costs, taken to New York.

They made Francis comfortable in the cabin. Except for the loss of blood the wound was not as serious as they had thought. The captain was skilful in these matters. A few weeks' quiet would mend the shoulder. Francis was resting more easily already.

Mr. de Valmy had of course played his penitent royalist rôle.

"Forgive me, monsieur," he begged Francis. "If I had known I would never have drawn my sword against Your Majesty."

Heavens no, he would have spirited him away to the Balise and sent him to France!

"You bested me, monsieur," Francis tried stiffly to be gracious, but the spilling of blood had not made these two any better friends, Raoul could see that. "Still, a foul trust, was it not, monsieur?"

"That is not fair!" Raoul exclaimed. "It was entirely my fault."

Mr. de Valmy was furious.

"You abuse the privilege of your rank, monsieur!" he told Francis flatly. "Just as you have abused the confidence and hospitality of your hosts in Orleans."

"How dare you!" Raoul had to keep Francis in his bunk.

"A king is expected to behave like a gentleman," Mr. de Valmy gave it to him right in the eyes. "You have not done so in Bourbon Street, monsieur! You have not behaved honorably with regard to a certain lady!"

"You — you drummer-boy!" Francis roared at him.

Raoul sat on his legs.

"Shut up, both of you," he commanded them. "You're acting like children, and you, de Valmy, you're talking like a fool. Now listen to me."

And he told him the whole truth about Mr. Jones, how the Dauphin had ceased to exist that afternoon in the Mother Superior's *parloir*, how it was his intention to preserve forever his American identity. Mr. de Valmy paced the cabin.

"Another foul thrust, monsieur!" he stopped suddenly in front of Francis. "I apologize."

"Of course you won't—" Raoul began his sentence and found it impossible to finish.

It was a delicate thing to ask de Valmy to join their conspiracy of silence. Mr. Jones was a rival, the Dauphin could not be. If for whatever reason de Valmy refused this request it would put him in the light of forcing the Dauphin into the open for his own private advantage. If Francis asked for his complicity it made him beholden to de Valmy for the privilege of pursuing his affair with Martinique. The situation between them was a little too ticklish for Raoul. He stared at his shoes. Francis stared at the top of the bunk. Mr. de Valmy paced the cabin again.

He understood perfectly. The record of his sentiments is fully set forth in his papers. Himself and Francis Jones, and one other thing. His own behavior with regard to Martinique was involved. He had his duty to perform, to find the Dauphin and to seize him. This had not prevented him from making love to Martinique; the Dauphin had been merely a symbol between them—the cockade which she kept in her heart. He was not hurting her by concealing his secret mission from her. He had convinced himself of that, condoned the

villainy. Anyway, there it was. He had made love to Martinique.

But now the Dauphin was Francis Jones, his rival, a vital personal element in his relations with Martinique. For all he knew—but he would not admit that—Francis Jones was the only one who could replace the white cockade in her heart. If he brought disaster to Francis Jones it might be the means of infinite hurt to Martinique. If he removed the Dauphin and won her, he could never be sure of the reality of his victory. Still another foul thrust! The other thing was obvious.

"You wish me to promise that I will conceal the Dauphin's identity," he spoke finally. "We may as well talk frankly. Of course I have no choice. Monsieur will not be able to say that I prevented him from returning to Bourbon Street."

It had nothing to do with causes and missions, as Mr. de Valmy saw it. It was a private matter between himself and Mr. Jones, and there was no other decision possible. And it sounded generous, he realized, magnanimous, creditable, something they would admire—when actually it was a lie. Of course he was going to prevent him, Mr. de Valmy was thinking. If he did his duty. They, for their part, did him the honor of a very complete silence.

"Go to New York," Raoul advised Francis, "to Mrs. Loring's boarding house on Broadway, and stay there quietly until we can arrange something. Keep away from Greenwich. You'll be perfectly safe. No one will recognize you as Francis Jones."

But Francis was all mutiny and rebellion.

"I won't leave Orleans," he maintained. "I'm not going to stay in this ship. Not for all the Spaniards in the world!"

"If you go ashore, monsieur," Raoul warned him, "I'll tell Mr. de Colignac and Martinique who you are, and be done with it."

"We must think of the Spaniards, monsieur!" Mr. de Valmy smiled at him significantly. He did not want the Dauphin in the Marquis de Casa Calvo's hands any more than did Raoul.

"Take your choice," Raoul insisted.

"It seems that I have no choice," Francis frowned. "And what are you going to do?"

"We'll have to go ashore," Raoul told him. "We could never explain our departure to Mr. de Colignac. He'd suspect something right away."

"We'll follow you north just as soon as possible, monsieur," Mr. de Valmy assured Francis, with complete sincerity. "As soon as we can think of something to tell Mr. de Colignac so we can leave Orleans."

"I think the Dauphin will have to die," Raoul suggested. "We'll find some proof of it, de Valmy and I, and that will put a stop to all this searching and hiding."

"That is an excellent idea!" Mr. de Valmy exclaimed. Excellent from every point of view, it seemed to him. "Why didn't you think of that before?"

"And what are you going to tell Mr. de Colignac about Mr. Jones?" Francis wanted to know. "What are you going to say about me?"

"Monsieur, I will say that the American authorities have deported you for breach of the peace." Raoul thought that he had an inspiration. "The governor has been threatening drastic measures for some time to put an end to brawls and street fighting—I will say that you were arrested and sent out of Orleans. Mr. de Valmy was let off because of his official connection with Mr. de Laussat. The duel was interrupted. How's that?"

Francis was looking at Mr. de Valmy.

"No," he announced. "I won't go unless Mr. de Valmy comes with me. You're talking rubbish when you threaten to tell Mr. de Colignac about me. And Spaniards or no Spaniards, I won't leave Orleans while Mr. de Valmy stays. If you can deport me you can deport him."

"All right!" Raoul took him up. "I'll say you were both arrested and sent out of Orleans. I might as well hang for a

sheep! What do you say, de Valmy?"

Mr. de Valmy was delighted, privately. He could have asked for nothing better than to accompany the Dauphin to New York. There they would be, himself and the Dauphin, and that famous package of Ducros's at Greenwich. A splendid arrangement for Number Seventeen's purposes.

"Madame de Lassy and Mademoiselle d'Aurelle are going north next week," he reminded Francis. "It will be a pleasure to be able to welcome them with you, monsieur!"

Raoul rather imagined that Francis had forgotten about that, in his anxiety to have Mr. de Valmy with him! Well, the thing was settled then. A pleasant voyage the two young turkey cocks would probably make of it! He left them looking sourly at each other and went ashore.

In his room, waiting for him, he found Mr. de Colignac.

"So here you are!" the duke was evidently very angry. He had heard something already then.

"Yes. Have you heard? There's been a duel!" Raoul thought that he might as well get it over. "Nobody's dead!"

"Indeed!" Mr. de Colignac glared at him. "That's what I came to find out about, this infernal duel!"

"Well," Raoul sailed in, "of all the —— fools in existence, commend me to de Valmy! What does he do tonight at the ball but get himself into an argument with that Mr. Jones! Over Martinique, of course. Something about a waltz. They insult each other for a while, and bing!—down to the levee."

"Bing down to the levee, eh? Go on."

"They start to fight, de Valmy takes a scratch, Mr. Jones is wounded, nothing serious. Still they fight."

"Oh, still they fight?"

"Yes, like maniacs!" Raoul assured him. "I heard about it at the Salle Condé and went down to see if I could stop it, but of course there was nothing I could do."

"No, I suppose not," the duke agreed with him. "And then what?"

"Then the *gendarmes* arrived. Yes, two or three squads of them— They were in a tremendous state, oh, terribly angry, and of course they arrested our two Romeos!"

"You don't tell me!" the duke marvelled. "The *gendarmes* arrested our two Romoes! They are in the *calaboza*?"

"Oh no," Raoul laughed glibly. "It's much better than that. They shipped them right out of Orleans. Yes sir—breach of the peace, brawling in the streets, I don't know what all. Deported on the spot! Bing! Like that, before any of us could breathe."

Raoul was not as comfortable as he could have wished. Now that he really heard it, it did not sound so fearfully plausible. The duke stared at him.

"Say that again?" he asked him finally.

"The *gendarmes*, they arrested de Valmy and Mr. Jones, and they've been deported for breach of the peace. Sent out of the Territory."

Mr. de Colignac put his head back and roared with laughter.

"That is superb!" he cried. "Superb!"

Raoul was glad that he liked it.

The duke wiped his eyes. Superb was no word for it, he told Mr. de la Motte afterward. When Martinique had summoned him to pour out her astonishing story he had gone at once to the levee. There was not a soul in sight, not a *gendarme* stirring, not a whisper in the Place d'Armes. When last seen Mr. Jones had been flat on his back having his wound dressed by de Valmy and Raoul—and there his precious godson sat, telling him these magnificent lies about arrests and deportations!

"Trying to make a monkey out of me, the grinning young fool!"

They had taken the Dauphin off and shipped him away from Orleans on account of the Spaniards—Mr. de Colignac was certain of that now—and de Valmy had gone with him, and this was all cock and bull for the old duke! More of this nonsense about the Dauphin's not wanting to be known. On account of Martinique, no doubt. Well, they would

soon put a stop to that. In the meantime Mr. de Colignac proposed to serve Raoul some of his own sauce, pretend to believe his fairy tale. And Martinique must do the same, or he would warn the Dauphin, and the young fly-by-night would disappear entirely.

"Tell me this," he inquired. "Martinique is naturally in all her states. She got wind of the duel and came crying around my door for me to go and see whether her sacred suitors had massacred each other. Is either of them seriously hurt?"

"Not at all," Raoul's voice was really convincing. "I saw them. De Valmy had a scratch and Mr. Jones was touched in the left shoulder. A painful wound, but not in the least dangerous. They're perfectly all right, both of them."

"And where were they sent, do you know?" Mr. de Colignac wondered what he would be told.

"They were given their choice," Raoul decided to explain. "They chose a ship sailing to New York. You see, Martinique is going north next week."

The duke realized that he had been told the truth. The two young cuckoos would not be far away when Martinique arrived.

"Well," he announced, "I've a great mind to go with her. We're accomplishing nothing here and it's time I got in touch with our friends in Philadelphia."

Raoul was delighted. Greenwich, Polly, an end to all this business in Orleans!

## CHAPTER XVII

### RED SEALS

THE two young cuckoos, it seems, were very seasick during the greater part of an extremely rough voyage. Off Hatteras one night they nearly became friends, thinking that they were about to die, but their enmity survived the storm. The shoulder was mending nicely.

They had to talk to each other once in a while or go mad.

"Tell me about your experience, Mr. de Valmy!" Francis would begin to nag at him suddenly. "Egypt—how wonderful that must have been! And your drum. Tell me about your drum, won't you?"

"It has helped win battles for France, my drum!" Mr. de Valmy finally retorted one day. "Did you ever help win a battle, monsieur?"

It amused him to lie there and insult the King of France.

"*Touché!*" Francis murmured. But he had his reply. "Just the same, monsieur," he reminded the other, "after five years the Spaniards did not mistake my white cockade for a white feather."

Mr. de Valmy rolled over in his bunk and went to sleep.

They landed one morning at the Battery in a town vicious with political animosities, screaming with flaunting broadsides. Morgan Lewis for Governor against Vice-President Burr; the Clintons against the "Martlings" and "Burrites;" the *American Citizen*, the *Post* and the *Corrector;* "Bloodhound" Cheetham, Coleman the "Wolf," and "Doctor Squintum" Irving; the posters of "Sylphid" and the pamphlets of "Aristides;" and in the background Alexander Hamilton, sowing the whirlwind. New York was boiling—venomous with slanders, perilous with duels, riotous with campaign violence.

They found rooms at Mrs. Loring's, cashed a draft of Raoul's, bought themselves some clothes and settled down to await events—news from Raoul and the arrival of Martinique. With a better passage than theirs, and in a ship bound for Philadelphia, she might be at New York within ten days. At the City Hotel, she had said, before visiting friends in the country.

"We will go together the first time," they agreed. "After that each man for himself."

And while they were waiting Mr. de Valmy had things to do which kept him very busy at the French consulate, where he startled them into a tremendous activity, and aboard the French frigate

*Gauloise* in the Bay, whose intended movements he countermanded with an abruptness of authority which greatly angered her captain until he whispered a few astonishing words in his ear.

Plans, instructions—the frigate to fetch the French North Atlantic squadron from its cruising station and rendezvous with it off Sandy Hook, men to be sent ashore, a boarding house on Broadway to be watched, a certain young gentleman to be seized and conveyed aboard the *Gauloise* for transfer to France. As soon as she returned with the report that the escorting squadron was assembled, Number Seventeen was very energetic and extremely mystifying.

"I want the names," he demanded, "of the concerns that did the carpentry work and bricklaying during the construction of Moore Mansion in 1793."

An idiotic request, it appeared to the consul, but Mr. de Valmy knew exactly what he was doing. The stupid Ducros had never thought of it, but perhaps the way to find out where Francis Vincent's package was kept at Moore Mansion was to ferret out the contractors who had worked on the house and discover whether it contained any secret closets. The most rigorous search on the part of Ducros's "servant" agents had failed to produce the package from any obvious repository. It might be then that it was concealed in some hidden place. In any case, the stone was worth turning.

The man who had supervised the work was found. An honest old soul, very proud of what had been an important job in his shops. Moore Mansion, his masterpiece, his show place.

Mr. de Valmy went to see him. He was thinking of building a house, he had heard that Moore Mansion was the finest modern country home on the island. Something like that, perhaps. Not so large, but the same fine workmanship. Mr. de Valmy was especially interested in mouldings and panels.

Of course the old plans and sketches for Moore Mansion were brought out.

"Lovely work!" Mr. de Valmy kept exclaiming, and hugged himself.

The old workman had probably forgotten all about it, but the construction drawings for the library distinctly showed a receptacle in the wall to the right of the fireplace and on a level with it. Behind what would be the middle of the second panel according to the scale. And among the sketches for the cypress panels of that room was a detailed design of a secret spring, in the exact center of the panel. Mr. de Valmy only had to glance at it and pushed it back under the other papers.

"Lovely work!"

And as for the house itself, could he possibly have a plan of the rooms to guide him in his own tentative arrangements? Certainly, with pleasure.

Mr. de Valmy went home. The next thing was to get into the library at Moore Mansion.

THE ship carrying Madame de Lassy and Martinique, Mr. de Colignac and Raoul, made a fair passage of it to Philadelphia. Martinique stayed in her cabin most of the time and scarcely spoke a word to Raoul. The ladies went on immediately to New York in a coach, carrying two letters of Raoul's, one to Polly and one to Francis announcing his arrival.

An hour later Raoul and the duke were at Mr. de la Motte's room. The others were summoned; the place was noisy with welcome.

And then the lightning fell on the unsuspecting Raoul. M. de Colignac went to the door and locked it and turned to face his godson.

"Now!" he announced. "I've been waiting for this moment. The marvel to me is that I don't simply choke you and be done with it!"

"Why? What's the matter?" Raoul had still no idea.

"Do you know what this young specimen has done?" the duke asked the others. "No, of course you don't. No one would imagine such a thing. He told you, he told me, that the Dauphin had

disappeared in Orleans. He lied. He's been lying all the time. The Dauphin is in New York."

Raoul sat back in his chair and bowed his head to the storm. The names they called him, *miséricorde!* So the duke had known all along! He described to them the duel as related to him by Mademoiselle d'Aurelle, the version of it fabricated by Raoul, the whole business. Raoul was completely flabbergasted. The old ones knew, Martinique knew, the fat was entirely in the fire. And how furious they were! Honor, loyalty, duty, falsehood, treachery, all the heavy words!

"I simply obeyed the King!" Raoul finally tried to defend himself. "I did what he wanted me to do. He has a right to decide."

They roared with laughter.

"Can you imagine!" Mr. de Colignac exclaimed. "The young idiot thinks he doesn't want to be king! He prefers to be Mr. Jones! I've known plenty of fools in that precious family. The Capets haven't had any sense for four generations! Louis XV was an old rip, his son was hopeless, Louis XVI—God rest his soul—was a simpleton if I ever saw one, his brothers Artois and Provence are clowns of the first water. You know what a disgusting object the cousin was, Philippe Egalité I mean. The greatest day in French history was the day they guillotined that swine. But this boy, this Louis XVII of ours, I think in some ways he takes the first prize."

Raoul was astonished. It was a revelation to him how one could serve so faithfully a majesty which one held in such familiar contempt. Good, bad or indifferent, an old rip, a simpleton or a clown—the individual did not count, it was the idea, the symbol, the figurehead which held them. That was why they were so terrible, the old ones.

"He has decided he doesn't want to be king!" Mr. de Colignac was still at it. "That insignificant young cuckoo thinks that after we have worn ourselves to the bone for years, trying to put his family back on the throne, he can calmly exchange his crown for a new hat and call himself Mr. Jones. Well, he'll soon find out! I'll talk to him, just as I talked to his father and to his lamentable uncles. I'm not sixty-seven years old as I stand in my breeches to be told by a King of France that he doesn't intend to reign over the country if I can get it back for him!"

It was a point of view, Raoul was forced to admit. A dreadfully sound, inherited point of view. They all agreed with Mr. de Colignac, of course. All this nonsense must be talked out of the Dauphin. They made Raoul tell them where the two runaways were hiding. There was no use pretending that he did not know, and they had him so browbeaten that he was almost beginning to believe that it was his duty.

"And you did not recognize him?" Mr. de la Motte asked Mr. de Colignac.

"*Ma foi*, no, I did not," the duke confessed. "But as I think of him now I begin to see it. He is really enormously attractive, you know. The young de Valmy too, they make a great pair. Well, messieurs, we must go to New York at once. Tomorrow."

"This young man?" Mr. de la Roche pointed to Raoul. "What about him?"

"That young man," Mr. de Colignac decided, "will remain locked up in this room until we are ready to take him to New York. No warning messages, my fine young fellow!"

What did it matter, Raoul was thinking, now that Martinique knew.

MADAME DE LASSY, it appears, had intended to spend several days at the City Hotel, but the town was in such a commotion over the election that she decided not to remain. She thought of going first to Richmond Hill, but there Colonel Burr was entirely occupied with his campaign, and Theodosia had not come north from Charleston with her husband after all. The Jumel menage was out of the question for Martinique—Jumel had just been diddled

into marrying his terrible Betsy, believing her to be on her deathbed only to find after the ceremony that she was in the most uproarious good health. Madame de Lassy went directly, therefore, to those other friends who were expecting her, and to whom Martinique had referred in Orleans without ever dreaming that it might be of the least importance to Mr. de Valmy or to Mr. Jones to know that they lived at Moore Mansion in Greenwich!

Martinique did not much care where she went. Life had come to an end on the levee at Orleans with the ringing in her ears of Mr. de Vendome's terrible words. Afterward Mr. de Colignac had explained to her a little of the astonishing story. Mr. de Fersen, Francis Vincent in New York—not Francis Jones originally—the kidnaping by Ducros and later by the Marquis Yrujo, the long captivity of *El Niño*. Mr. de Vendome had planned a rescue with Mr. de Valmy, who was royalist after all under his Republican disguises. Now the two of them were in alliance with the Dauphin to conceal his identity. Mr. Jones and Mr. de Valmy were hiding in New York.

"My child," the duke had asked her, "you understand what all this means, don't you? He is the King of France. Mr. Jones does not exist."

Yes, Martinique understood. Mr. de Colignac did not have to tell her. Mr. Jones did not exist. She had given him back to France. In the midst of her disaster this single purpose animated what was left of life, one glorious victory could be fashioned from her defeat. France must be served, the King restored unto his own. The happiness of Martinique d'Aurelle was a little thing in comparison. She would not see him again. They had left no word in the city, he would not know where to look for her. Soon he would be told that Mr. Jones had perished at Orleans.

Martinique was very determined, very brave, very patient in the presence of Polly's unreticent rhapsodies concerning Mr. de Vendome. Yes, Martinique had seen him in Orleans. Yes, he was a very splendid young gentleman. Yes, he was in Philadelphia. Yes, yes, yes.

Martinique would not see Mr. Jones again, but she must write to him, a letter which Mr. de Colignac would give him. Just once, to tell him that he must not blame himself for anything, that he must not think that she misunderstood his behavior, that she would always think of him with respect, and that he must go now without regrets and wear the golden lilies.

She wrote it late one evening in the library—a courageously short little letter after many long attempts, finished under a guttering candle. There, it was done. Martinique leaned back in the big chair and closed her eyes. She was exhausted, unutterably weary of her burden of sorrow, a forlorn captive of her own dark thoughts. The house was very quiet.

Suddenly—she could not tell how long afterward—Martinique opened her eyes. The candle was out, she felt cold. She had fallen asleep. There was wind and rain outside. The windows were rattling.

Something had aroused her. There, again! Some one was at the window across the room, some one was coming in—

Martinique was wide awake with fright. Without a sound she scurried behind the curtains of the window near the desk.

MR. DE VALMY had slipped away from Mrs. Loring's, leaving Francis in all his despairs over the departure of Martinique from the City Hotel. They had been to inquire several times already, and again as soon as Raoul's letter had reached them, only to learn that Madame de Lassy had gone straight on to the country. No, the clerks did not know where. No, there were no messages.

Mr. de Valmy was just as well pleased. Martinique would only complicate matters. Let him get his hands, if possible, on Ducros's package, clap the Dauphin

aboard the frigate, and then he would find Martinique. If not in New York then in Orleans. For he had made up his mind to it. He would not give up Martinique, not for all the scruples in the world. This business of the Dauphin at an end, he would resign from the secret police and tell her nothing. As for Mr. Jones, Mr. de Valmy was not to be expected to keep track of Mr. Jones.

And now the time had come for the attempt on Moore Mansion. He would effect an entrance into the library, open the hidden closet, steal the package if it was to be found. There was no other way that he could think of. He took a late stage to Greenwich, gave himself a good supper at the inn, wrote a letter to Paris and went out for a walk. It was his intention, he explained in his report, to conceal himself in the woods behind the mansion and wait until the smallest hours of the night before he undertook his venture. If anything happened to him, if he was not at the consulate the next morning, they had orders to seize the Dauphin as soon as the frigate returned. She might be expected any day now.

Martinique heard him at the shutter, forcing open the French window. From her recess she saw him step into the room. When he lit the stub of candle which he had brought with him she recognized him. The certainty seems immediately to have come to her that whatever Mr. de Valmy was doing there had some connection with the Dauphin. Through the gap in the curtains she watched him, to see what he was up to.

He put the candle down on the corner of the mantelpiece; he went at once to the second panel to the right and pressed it. The panel swung open. Mr. de Valmy reached into the hole behind the panel and pulled out a package covered with red seals. By the flaring candle light he examined it—there was writing on the exterior, apparently—then he closed the panel. Just as he did so there was a steady knocking at the front door.

Mr. de Valmy blew out the candle and for a few seconds there was absolute silence in the room. The knocking continued. Mr. de Valmy started for the window—and there was a voice outside calling to some one.

"Here's an open window—we'll get in this way. They don't hear us knocking—"

Mr. de Valmy and the newcomer smashed into each other. A second figure was coming through the window on top of them.

"What the ——! Quick, strike a light, I've got a fellow here—"

Martinique saw a flash, the candle was being lit again. The man by the mantelpiece was Mr. de Vendome. The one sitting on Mr. de Valmy's chest was Mr. Jones.

"What the —— are you doing here?" The surprize and anger were mutual.

But the explanations were quickly given. Mr. de Valmy had come to get the package for the Dauphin.

"Package? What package?"

"Don't talk so loud. Close that window!"

Why, the package containing the proof of the Dauphin's identity which Ducros had seen. Mr. de Valmy had succeeded in discovering its hiding place. He supposed that the Dauphin would want it in his possession. Martinique was listening with all her ears.

"We didn't know about any package. Why didn't you tell us before?"

"Didn't we talk about it at Orleans? I thought of course you knew—" Mr. de Valmy must have been in a perfect sweat!

"Well, have you got it? You're a fool to come here this way!"

Mr. de Valmy produced the package, but they hardly glanced at it and he stuffed it back in his pocket.

"Never mind all that now," Francis told him. "We're in a —— of a fix. The cat's out of the bag."

Raoul related what had happened at Philadelphia. The old ones had brought him to New York with them—they were in the city now. But at the ferry landing he had finally managed to break away from them in time to warn the Dauphin.

Mr. de Colignac was coming to take him back to Philadelphia. They had it all arranged with the British Consul to put him on a ship and convey him to London until the time should arrive for a landing in France. He had decided to come to Greenwich, to tell Miss Abigail Moore the whole truth and face the music when they found out. At least Mr. de Colignac would not attempt to take him by force from Moore Mansion. Now they would say that Mr. de Valmy had come with them. Not a word about the package.

"Do you understand, monsieur?" Francis looked hard at Mr. de Valmy. "Everybody knows that I am the Dauphin."

"I regret your ill fortune, monsieur," Mr. de Valmy gave him back his look.

Francis stepped up to him.

"I will never be King of France," he announced. "Understand that too. I am Francis Jones, and Francis Jones I intend to remain. Whatever happens, and whatever fortune should befall me, good or ill."

"As you please, monsieur," Mr. de Valmy bowed.

"They'll talk you into it," Raoul shook his head. "You don't know those old ones with their white cockades. When they begin it's hopeless. They'll make you believe anything. They've got everything on their side, duty patriotism, *noblesse oblige*. They represent all the things you can't deny. They are like swords around a banner. And they have no pity. They'll sweep you away."

"Never!" Francis exclaimed. "I made up my mind to it as soon as the Spaniards told me. Now, nothing could ever change me. They can't force me except by violence. Now that we've got this package they can't ever prove that I am the Dauphin if I choose to deny it. And my uncles will require proof. They must realize that. Here I stand, Francis Jones, Francis Vincent—it's all one. Take away your swords and banners, paper the wall with your white cockades! I have a right to good fortune and happiness if I am man enough to win them."

He bowed in his turn to Mr. de Valmy —Martinique saw him through a mist of tears—and Raoul put out his hand.

"Listen!" he insisted. "What's that?"

There was a sudden crunching of wheels on gravel, a confusion of voices outside the windows, then a fearful pounding at the front door. Raoul pointed to the big chair behind the desk.

"Sit down, monsieur," he suggested to Francis. "I think the white cockades have come!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### NUMBER SEVENTEEN

RAOUL was right. The white cockades were there. It was Mr. de Colignac's voice haranguing the servants who had come tumbling down the stairs to let him in.

"Do not be alarmed! I am the Duke de Colignac. Tell Miss Moore that I will explain everything in a moment. Are you watching that lighted window, de Croisic?"

In an instant he was at the library door. The Duc de la Roche and Mr. de la Motte were with him, they stared very hard at the Dauphin, at Mr. de Valmy, at Raoul. Behind them, in the hallway and on the landing, a confusion of servants with candelabra, a fluttering of women in hasty negligée, the maids, Miss Abigail Moore, Polly. Raoul caught sight of her at once.

"Polly!"

"Raoul!"

Mr. de Colignac slammed the door.

"Shut up, you miserable fool!" he glared at his godson. "Let's have some light here! More candles!"

Martinique shivered a little. It was a bad omen in Louisiana to light candles in a room already containing a lighted one. Something dreadful would happen.

"How did you know we were here?" Raoul ventured a question.

"None of your business," he was told. "I'll talk to you later."

The three old ones stepped forward slowly to the desk; together they bowed

profoundly to the seated figure. And then Mr. de Colignac addressed his King.

"My good young sir," he inquired, "what in the name of all the patron saints of France do you think you're doing?"

"Is it any of your business, monsieur?" Francis gave him all the steel in his blue eyes.

The old duke came a step nearer.

"Listen to me, my boy," he advised the Dauphin. "Don't ride your high horse in front of me. I was present at your birth; I was Chamberlain of your household when you were still Duke of Normandy; I knew your father when he was an infant in arms; I was privileged to sit in the presence of your great-grandfather Louis XV—if it could be called a privilege; during the course of my life I have known four Dauphins of France, including your late older brother. In the absence of the Princes of the Blood, your uncles, I represent the highest authority in the kingdom. Everything that you do is my business."

"Well, and what of it?"

"What of it? I have come to tell you that the comedy of Mr. Jones is finished, that this ridiculous gallivanting around is over, that you will accompany us to Philadelphia, and that from now on you will try to behave with some slight regard for the illustrious name that you bear."

"My name is Francis Jones, and I am here to tell you, monsieur, that I will do no such thing."

"You poor young clown!" the duke roared at him. "If that doesn't sound exactly like a Capet! *You* are here to tell me—*you* will do no such thing! One might think you had something to say about it! Well, understand this once and for all! You have nothing to say about it, do you hear? You will do as you are told. By the grace of God and the sweat of my bones some day we may manage to put you back on your throne. Until then you will take your orders from me."

Francis simply smiled.

"You can perhaps talk like that to a king of France, monsieur," he remarked, "but not to Francis Jones."

"Wretched child," Mr. de Colignac leaned over the desk, "don't you understand? It is to a king of France that I am talking. You can't escape from it. God makes men and picks some of them to be kings. A king's duty to his people, to those who have served him in every adversity, is not a coat to be put on and taken off at will. You can not choose whether you will be the King of France, monsieur—you *are* the King of France."

"And I say that I am Francis Jones," Francis insisted. "Prove to me that I am the King of France."

"God save us!" Mr. de la Motte exclaimed. "Listen to him!"

"Prove to me that I am the King of France," Francis repeated. "It is not enough to proclaim it, it must be proved. The Princes of the Blood, they will not be satisfied just to take your word for it. Prove it, monsieur! Produce your evidence!"

Raoul could not help it, he had to burst out laughing. His godfather turned to annihilate him. Before he could say a word they were all startled breathless by the sound of an unexpected voice which brought Francis leaping from his chair.

"There's a package—it contains all the evidence about the Dauphin. Mr. de Valmy has it!"

"Martinique!"

Martinique standing between the curtains which she had pushed aside, a desperately pale little ghost, her great brown eyes glistening, the candle light performing miracles with her hair. Brave little Martinique, with the white cockade in her heart.

She could have kept silent, remained concealed behind her curtains. Francis was right, the stupid old ones were defeated. No matter who else in the house might know about it, the package itself was gone from its hiding place. The three young ones had only to say nothing and destroy the package at the first opportunity. Martinique had only to join their conspiracy. The fate of Francis Jones was in her hands, and with that fate her own.

Martinique understood all this; alone in the dark of her window recess she listened to the battle devastating her heart, and at the end she was there facing them, telling them everything that she had heard, flinging away the precious secret, denying Francis Jones in order to help save a king for France. The white cockade had won.

"Mademoiselle!" Francis was at her side. "You've been here all the time? You heard what I said to Mr. de Valmy a few moments ago. I was not simply masquerading in Orleans when I let you think that I was Francis Jones. I never intended to be anything else. Mademoiselle, you believe that, don't you?"

Martinique smiled at him.

"Oh yes, monsieur," she assured him. "I believe that. I have never doubted it." She did not tell him that she had written it to him already in a letter.

"Then, mademoiselle," Francis asked her, "if I speak to you now as Francis Jones, will you still believe it? What does it matter about this package! There may be a hundred packages containing all the evidence in the world, but after they have all been opened I will still be Francis Jones. Martinique—will you listen to what I want to say?"

"Monsieur," she replied without the flicker of an eyelash, "I am obliged to listen to anything the King of France may wish to tell me."

"You turn against me!" Francis cried.

Martinique's smile became inscrutable.

"Yes, that's it. I turn against you, monsieur!" she agreed.

Mr. de Valmy did not say a word. Raoul could see that he was listening with every breath in his body, but no shade of expression touched his face. The man had style. Mr. de Colignac was towering over him.

"Hand it over," he commanded.

Mr. de Valmy gave him the package. A lovely night's work, it must have seemed to Number Seventeen, but he was helpless for the time being in their presence; it would have been useless to deny that he had the package.

Mr. de Colignac came to the desk and sat down.

He read what was written on the outside of the package:

> *Francis Vincent, March 27, 1806. This package contains the documents establishing the identity of Francis Vincent.*
>
> *—Axel de Fersen.*

"With your permission, monsieur—" he glanced at Francis—"I now propose to open this package."

"And I forbid you to open it," Francis tried still to prevent him.

"Then without your permission, monsieur," the duke remarked, "I now propose to open this package."

He broke the seals one by one, untied the well knotted tape, removed the stained covering. There were various little objects, trinkets presumably, separately wrapped, and some papers. Mr. de Colignac took up the first one.

"This is a letter from Mr. de Fersen to Mr. Vincent," he told them. "I will read it."

> *Monsieur, this package contains certain heirlooms of your family and certain documents relative to your ancestry which I believe it is your right to be made aware of. A good many years will have passed before they come into your hands, and you will be the best judge then of their significance.*

"Exactly!" Francis exclaimed. "I will be the best judge!"

Mr. de Colignac ignored him.

> *Whatever surprize they may occasion you,* he went on, *I beg you to rest assured that to my personal and positive knowledge you, Francis Vincent so called, are the person referred to in these papers. Your devoted servitor,*
>
> *Axel de Fersen.*

"No one, I think, will question the authenticity of the documents."

Francis had flung himself into a chair;

Mr. de Valmy was gazing at Martinique, who had not moved from her frame of curtains; the others were waiting a little impatiently for the duke to get through. Raoul was wondering whether Polly was still on the other side of the closed door. As for the package and its contents—the old ones would still be faced with a rebellious Francis Jones, for all their evidence.

The duke picked up the second paper and leaned back to examine it. It took him what seemed an endless time—the tiresome old duke. Finally he put the paper down and stood up.

"Messieurs — Martinique," he announced, "you may be seated!"

Be seated! What did he mean?

"I mean that we are all imbeciles of the first magnitude!" He glared at everybody. "Mr. Vincent is not the Dauphin at all."

"Not the Dauphin! Monsieur is not the Dauphin!"

"Bravo, bravo! I'm delighted!"

That was Raoul, of course, springing forward to shake hands with Francis.

"——! What are you saying—that he is not the King of France?"

"No, Mr. de Valmy, he is not the King of France. He is some one entirely different, and we are a pack of blithering fools. We thought that Mr. de Fersen had deceived us, but it was we who deceived ourselves. Because of a certain resemblance, and because Mr. Vincent was brought to America by Mr. de Fersen, every one jumped to the conclusion that Mr. Vincent was the Dauphin. But he is not Dauphin—here, read for yourself."

The room was in an uproar, all of them gesticulating around the duke, while Mr. de Valmy devoured the sentences on the page which Mr. de Colignac allowed him to see.

"Show us! Show us!" they were clamoring.

"Just a second!" The duke waved them back. He reached for a piece of paper and wrote a sentence on it. "We will all sign this statement testifying that Mr. Jones—or Mr. Vincent—is not the Dauphin, for me to take with me to France. Mr. de Valmy, you've already read the document which shows who he really is."

Mr. de Valmy signed his name. The duke motioned to Mr. de la Motte.

"Here, de la Motte, you were the first to recognize him! Suppose you read it next and sign. No, after all, perhaps we would be more polite to let Mr. Jones see it and tell us himself! Monsieur, will you read this curses document of yours!"

Somehow, Raoul thought that his godfather was not as angry as he seemed. Francis took the paper which Mr. de Colignac handed to him, and stood for a moment looking at Martinique. She had not said a word. Her eyes were closed, her lip white under the pressure of little biting teeth. Francis turned to Mr. de Colignac.

"You are satisfied, monsieur," he asked him, "that I am not the Dauphin after all?"

"I am not satisfied at all!" Mr. de Colignac smiled at him. "Permit me to say that as Dauphins go you would have made by far the best one I have ever seen. I regret that you are not to ride before us through the Vendée, monsieur. But I am obliged to admit that you are not the Dauphin, Mr. Jones! These gentlemen were deceived by a childhood resemblance and by the presence of Mr. de Fersen in your affairs, and if there is any consolation for us in all this it will be the thought that for five years the Spaniards were as big fools as ourselves. You have no connection whatever with the royal family of France. I daresay you are to be congratulated!"

Francis took a step and shoved the paper into the candle flame.

"There!" he exclaimed. "It doesn't matter who I may have been. I don't want to know any more about it, I don't want any one else to know. Mr. de Colignac, Mr. de Valmy, I request you to respect my wishes. From now on I am Francis Vincent, of Brook Field."

The duke stirred the little heap of charred fragments with his finger.

"So be it," he remarked.

Francis was looking at Martinique again.

"Mademoiselle," he begged her, "just now, when you were obliged to listen, I did not say what I wanted to say. Now that you are no longer obliged to listen, may I speak to you?"

Martinique opened her eyes very wide. A few minutes before she believed that she had surrendered him with the package. Now because of that very package they had given him back to her. He was not the King of France; he was Francis Vincent of Brook Field. By her readiness to lose him she had saved him. It was too victorious a joy to realize all at once.

"You were going to ask me to marry you." She let her straightforward words startle him suddenly.

"I adore you," he replied.

There they were at it again, Raoul said to himself, before a whole crowd of people. Now when he asked Polly it would be in the orchard, under the third tree to the left.

Mr. de Valmy was at Francis's side in an instant.

"Mademoiselle," he reminded her, "you have never answered me when I've asked you the same question. Monsieur will permit me, I think, to repeat it now."

For Mr. de Valmy the vanishing before his eyes of the King of France was perhaps a welcome catastrophe. There was no Dauphin any more, no duty to be performed, no scruple now of pride even to impede his approach to Martinique. Let her decide between them, if the time had come.

"Is it to be either of us, Martinique?" Francis stood his ground.

It was absurd, Raoul wrote afterward —the two of them like that, in front of a roomful of gentlemen all listening for all they were worth, although they were pretending to watch Mr. de Colignac unwrap the trinkets—a ring, a Cross of St. Louis on a blue riband, some odds and ends.

"Oh!" they heard Martinique exclaim.

And that was all. She did not say anything else.

Raoul simply had to look around. Mr. de Valmy was staring at the floor. The little Niquette was fast in Francis's capable arms. The Spaniards seemed to have taught him everything.

"I still don't understand how you knew that we were here," Raoul reminded his godfather.

It was necessary, it seemed to him, to start some sort of conversation, to provide Mr. de Valmy with an escape from his isolation, to give Francis and Martinique an opportunity to come back to earth.

"Ah!" Mr. de Colignac exclaimed. "That is a very interesting story which I will now relate to you. Martinique, Mr. Jones—pardon me, Mr. Vincent—Mr. de Valmy, listen to my little story. You young gentlemen thought that you were being very clever with your package, but it happens that I knew about it already before Mademoiselle d'Aurelle here so loyally interposed."

"You already knew about the package?"

"Yes. You see, when we arrived in New York we went to Mr. Jones's room and there we found a gentleman who told us all about it."

"A gentleman? What gentleman?" Mr. de Valmy inquired.

"Fetch the gentleman," the duke requested Mr. de la Motte.

Mr. de la Motte went to the door and looked out.

"Come in, de Croisic," he called, and stood aside.

Mr. de Croisic came into the room, pushing before him a forlorn looking citizen, bedraggled and unkempt, in a state of cringing apprehension. But what startled Raoul was to see Mr. de la Roche step suddenly behind Mr. de Valmy. And there was such a queer look on de Valmy's face.

"Who's that fellow?" Francis asked.

"That fellow," Mr. de Colignac told him, "is a gentleman we caught listening outside your door. To be precise, we

caught him coming out of Mr. de Valmy's room. When we threatened to exterminate him he began to talk."

"What did he say?" Mr. de Valmy's voice was as queer as his look.

The duke swung around to face him.

"He said that he was employed by the French Consulate to watch Mr. Jones, that Mr. Jones and another gentleman had just run out of the house, that he—this specimen here—had come to leave a message in your room, Mr. de Valmy, and that you were trying to break into Moore Mansion to look for a package which belonged to the Dauphin. That's what he said, and that's why we came here. We were not expecting to find Mr. Jones and Raoul here at all."

"Oh," Mr. de Valmy laughed. "I see. Those fellows know me as a police agent of course, and it was from the reports of the man Ducros that I found out about the package. But you understand all that, naturally. And so this fool blabbed?"

"Yes." Mr. de Colignac took time to smile. "This fool blabbed. And now, Mr. de Valmy, perhaps you will understand why I secured your signature to this statement regarding Mr. Jones's identity?"

"Why, what do you mean?"

"So that this individual can take it to the French Consulate. Here, you," he beckoned to the man. "Take this paper and tell your friends on the frigate that we don't need her any more. Mr. Jones is not the Dauphin. Now clear out!"

"Frigate!" Mr. de Valmy cried, as the fellow went scurrying out of the room, and Raoul realized for the first time that Mr. de la Roche had his pistol out. "Frigate! What's this about a frigate?"

"Oh, your friend told us everything," Mr. de Colignac informed him. "Your orders to seize the Dauphin, your frigate to take him to France—everything!" And all at once he gave Mr. de Valmy a great shove away from him. "Stand back, you traitor!" he commanded.

"Mr. de Valmy!" It was Martinique's horrified voice which seemed to concentrate in it all of their incredulous disgust.

And it was to her that he made his answer.

"A police agent, mademoiselle, that is true. But not a traitor. I am Number Seventeen of the Imperial secret police, and I have not betrayed my trust. To these gentlemen I owe no allegiance; it is for the Emperor alone to say whether I am a traitor."

"And I gave you friendship and esteem—I let you say things to me! Oh, I am terribly ashamed!" Martinique hid her face in her hands.

"Gentlemen, what are we going to do with this creature?" Mr. de Colignac was asking. "He would have betrayed the Dauphin, he did betray our confidence and friendship. This drummer-boy!"

"Pah!" Mr. de la Roche exclaimed, "a spy! Kill him, as you would a cockroach!"

Francis stepped forward.

"Just a moment," he begged them. "You can't kill a man in cold blood like that. I have something to say to him, and it is this—he has permitted himself to abuse every conception of hospitality and good faith, he has presumed to insult a lady with his presence, and in so doing he has insulted me—"

"Francis! Francis!" Martinique saw what was coming.

"Arm yourself, Mr. de Valmy," Francis went right on, "and return my fire!"

"And mine!" Raoul flung up his hand.

"And mine—and mine—" they all joined in.

Mr. de Colignac gave a great laugh.

"Splendid!" he cried. "He can pay his debt to all of us, one shot each. If he is alive at the end he can go. Monsieur de Valmy, we challenge you!"—and the duke swept him a deep bow.

"You honor me, messieurs," Mr. de Valmy smiled. "Dukes, marquises, counts—a noble firing squad for the drummer-boy! Six of you. I accept."

Martinique was hanging on Francis's shoulder.

"Oh no!" she insisted. "You are mad,

all of you! Let him go! Francis, you have no right to do this! I forbid you to expose yourself—"

"Martinique dear!" Francis gently freed himself from her panic stricken hands. "Mr. de Valmy has accepted. I am more obligated to him than these other gentlemen even. The affair at Orleans was not finished. I am still at his service."

She flew across the room to Mr. de Valmy.

"Go!" she implored him. "Go away from these madmen! Must I get down on my knees to you?"

"Mademoiselle," he replied, "do you ask me to let them call me a coward as well as a traitor? These gentlemen have challenged me."

Martinique saw that it was useless. This insane thing was going to happen. Mr. de Colignac was already at his arrangements.

"Mr. de Valmy had better stand in that corner," he was deciding. "Then he will not have the reflection from the mirror in his eyes. We will fire—leave the room, Martinique, this is no place for you; go and tell Miss Moore that we may need her—we will fire on signal—ready, present, fire, one, two, three—and the principals must fire before the word three or lose their fire. A snap or a flash is a fire. I will stand in this corner—"

"Not yet," Francis reminded him. "I challenged him first, I have the honor!"

"Oh, no!" the Duke objected. "You boys last. We old ones will come first. I absolutely insist on that!"

"Never in the world," Raoul maintained. "On the contrary—"

Mr. de Croisic was tearing up bits of paper.

"We won't argue about it," he suggested. "We are keeping Mr. de Valmy waiting. We will draw lots. Each of you take a number."

He passed his hat around. Martinique watched them help themselves—she had no idea of leaving the room. She heard them announce their numbers.

"Four."

"Three."

"Oh ——! Six!" That was Raoul.

Francis had number two. Mr. de Colignac was first.

"I should hope so!" he remarked. "Lock the door, de la Motte. Raoul, you give the signal. Messieurs, I salute you! Mr. de Valmy, are you ready? Then stand up straight, drummer-boy!"

"Have you finished talking, monsieur?"

"Silence!" Raoul was at his place. "Fire before the word three. Ready!" The pistols went up. "Present!" The barrels swung out, stiffly horizontal. "Fire— One—"

The two detonations came almost together. The duke was not hit. Mr. de Valmy had dropped his pistol. For a second he stood smiling, his hands at his sides, very straight. Then he shook his head impatiently.

"Ah—*touché!*" he complained, and fell forward on his face.

Martinique gave a little cry, and fainted.

Raoul was busy for a few moments helping Francis revive her; he could not tell exactly what was going on at the further side of the room. He saw Mr. de Colignac stride over to the fallen man and turn him over on his back. He heard him order the others to stand clear and bring him a candle. There was silence, then a mumble of talk. And then Mr. de Valmy's voice, quite loud and querulous for an instant.

"All my life—all my life—"

Martinique was feeling better. Raoul went to the other group. Mr. de Colignac had risen.

"He is dead," he announced.

"Pah!" Mr. de la Roche exclaimed. "Good riddance. A spy!"

"Yes," Mr. de la Motte agreed. "A man may be a blackguard, a liar, a cheat. But a spy—that is damnable to me."

"Vermin!" Mr. de Croisic summed it up, and pushed the body with his foot.

Mr. de Colignac shook his head.

"What you say is true," he sighed. "But here is something much more damnable."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Look at that man on the floor," Mr. de Colignac told them. "That liar and cheat and blackguard, that vermin, that spy, Napoleon's Number Seventeen—look at him well!"

"Why?"

"Because there lies your real Dauphin! France's Louis Number Seventeen!"

One by one they sprang forward hotly to repudiate such a monstrous fact. And one by one they found themselves following Mr. de Colignac's outstretched finger and staring at the face in the candle light.

"Here in my hand," Mr. de Colignac showed them, "I have a gold locket and chain which I found around his neck when I opened his shirt. I asked him how long he'd had it; you heard his answer—'All my life.' And then he died. It is the locket which I referred to once in a letter to de la Motte. I gave it to the Dauphin myself long ago at Versailles. It contains a miniature of him as a little boy and the royal arms of France. He can't ever have opened it himself. There is a trick to it, you see—"

But they were all staring at the face in the candle light. A calm, peaceful face, now that the repose of death had come into it smoothing out little lines of hardship and harsh shadows, leaving only a nobility and dignity which the living features had obscured. A young face, so much younger suddenly than the one which they had known in life. It was not the locket that mattered any more. It was the face itself, with the blond hair pushed back from the forehead so deceptively like Francis Vincent's, the pale, transfigured face in the candle light.

They stood aside for Martinique.

"How different he looks," she whispered. "But how could it have happened?"

"I suppose he ran away from those peasants we left him with," Mr. de Colignac explained. "And they pretended that he had died. He ran away and became a drummer-boy. And then he became a police spy searching for the Dauphin! Could anything be more miserable? Was there ever a life more cruelly wasted!"

"He was a brave gentleman, and he served the France he knew," Martinique reminded the duke. "He was right, he was not a traitor. In his eyes it was we who were the traitors. And at the end he was very gallant, like a king."

"And I killed him!" Mr. de Colignac cried. "I who was his guardian once, I killed the Son of France! Tear up your white cockades, gentlemen! We shall not need them any more!"

Francis took Martinique's hand.

"Come," he suggested. "There will never be any cockades again. Tomorrow we will go to Brook Field."

They passed out of the room together.

THE END

# The Camp-Fire

*A free-to-all* Meeting-Place *for* Readers, Writers *and* Adventurers

*OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.*

*We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The* spirit *of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.*

*But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.*

*Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.*

*If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.*

FROM a Camp-Fire comrade in England comes a clipping from the *Observer* of November 7, from an Australian correspondent, concerning the New Guinea gold rush. Further details could be secured from L. P. B. Armit, our "Ask Adventure" expert for New Guinea, but, though there seems to be plenty of gold, there is an unusually large number of difficulties in the way and presumably all the best ground has been staked. But it's interesting to read about:

The original big rushes to Australia have all been in connection with the discoveries of the gold-fields in Victoria, in West Australia, and elsewhere, and there are many people who are confident that no considerable increase of population can be expected until there is a new gold rush. It is common knowledge that the surface of Australia has only been scratched in the searches for minerals, and that there is far more wealth remaining underground undiscovered than has ever been brought to the surface. For all its excellence, mining machinery is still incomplete from the point of view of being able to follow a lode or vein, and once a lode is lost there are inconceivable difficulties in finding it again.

It would appear, however, that Australia is on the verge of a new mineral era. Discoveries of great importance have been made of recent years, as, for example, the Mount Isa silver-lead field in Queensland, where £13,000,000 worth of ore is already

visible, and where it is estimated conservatively by the Queensland Government statistician that £100,000,000 worth will be eventually released. From the Northern Territory from time to time come reports of gold and other discoveries, and it is certain now that some of these at least are of great value. From West Australia comes the report of a new goldfield, the potentialities of which are great, though not yet sufficiently known to be exactly judged.

It is from the Mandated Territory of New Guinea that the most sensational find of many years has been reported. The Salamoa goldfields are situated about 550 miles from the capital, Rabaul. That is to say that Salamoa is so situated. The goldfields themselves are thirty miles distant, a very short distance, as it might seem, but actually eight days' traveling. The reason for this is that to reach them a range of mountains over 8,000 feet in height has to be surmounted, gorges have to be traversed, and all the way is dense jungle, the tracks of which are infested with leeches, scrub-itch parasites, and other noxious beings, but equally by birds of paradise, bower birds, goura pigeons, and others of the most beautiful creations the world contains. As one who has returned from there told the writer, it is little consolation for being drained by leeches to hear the bower birds twittering overhead.

The Salamoa goldfield is described (and shipments that have been received and are known to be in store warrant the expression) as an Eldorado. The gold is on the surface and is obtained simply by digging and washing. Ten ounces to the dish is a common record. The quality of the gold on the Bulolo field, that is, the end of the valley nearest to the mountain range, is not particularly high, being valued at about 54s. per ounce. Still, a few thousand ounces at that price are worth having. Higher up the valley, however, at what is called Eddie Creek, the gold is of much better quality, and is valued at between 75s. and 85s.

Naturally there has been a rush to get to Salamoa. Many have gone, but few have been licensed, for the New Guinea Government has refused to allow any person on the field unless they have a fairly considerable sum of money and a prospector's license. This can only be obtained at Rabaul, and there are long delays in connection with it.

On the field itself there is considerable feeling of discontent at these regulations, because a large number of the officers and servants of the Administration have thrown up their jobs, secured licenses and gone on the field, which is not considered fair play. Perhaps, however, a good many have been saved from disaster by the regulations, although the gold prospector is quite prepared to take any and all risks; it is part of his business. Access to the field can only be had with the aid of porters, and these, always scarce, have become a rarity, as much as £30 being paid per man for the trip. The porters have to carry food and equipment, medicines, and necessities, and can each take a load of about fifty pounds weight.

Remarkable instances of riches are reported from the field. For example, two of the original prospectors on the Bulolo field—they were there first—obtained 10,990 ounces by washing in six months, and they then brought their gold down to the coast, and it was from them that the first announcements of the great discovery were received. The estimated yield at the present time from the Bulolo field is 1,000 ounces of gold per day, and such are the conditions there that the gold is being stacked away in kerosene tins, kettles, dishes, and any sort of receptacle until it can be moved to the coast. The Eldorado of New Guinea appears like proving one of the romances of mining history.

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IT HAPPENED. I knew it would. When the Bloody Hand of the O'Neills was first mentioned at Camp-Fire by John Dorman, who had used it in one of his stories, I knew there would be trouble—that the Irish and the Scotch would eventually and surely have at each other. When Mr. MacNeill talked to Camp-Fire he called it the Bloody Hand of the MacNeills, not the O'Neills, and by that token I knew the fight had arrived. For this apparently innocent legend involves the large and bitterly debated question—Did the Scotch come from Ireland or the Irish from Scotland?

I've tried to be neutral, having both Scotch and Irish blood in me, but being neutral with that mixture is no easy job and, anyhow, I've already committed myself right in the last paragraph by saying O'Neills instead of MacNeills. All right, I throw in with the Irish. Now let's go to it. But remember, me boys, we're all Celts together, and Gaels at that. This is just one of our family quarrels. No real harm meant.

Here's a letter from Philip Francis Nowlan, who is by way of being an authority on things Celtic. There was once a time when I was fairly read up on the Celts myself, there are still some shelves of books at home bearing on this subject and I'll say right now that this first round goes to Mr. Nowlan, for his knowledge of the subject is far sounder and broader than is that of his adversary, asking said adversary's pardon and no harm meant. Mr. Nowlan needs no endorsement from me to establish his right to speak, but he's

getting it anyhow, because my own reading checks up almost every point he makes.

My reading was in the main mapped out for me by one who knows, but in fairness I must confess that he was Irish of the Irish—"A. E.," George Russell, and said mapping was done in Dublin and many of the books bought there. The theory of Celtic admixture among the Berbers is new to me; Mr. Nowlan is, I think, a bit free and Irish in picturing Celto-Roman relations—as I remember they sacked Rome only once, were bought off another time and for several centuries were no more than a real threat; he knows far more about Celts in Egypt than I ever did—more about the whole subject, of course. But so far as my reading goes, I back him. And my reading is not wholly Irish—back under the best of it lie French, German, and Italian authorities—neutral students of the past. The prejudice of most English writers on Celtic matters is too prejudiced for consideration.

Anyhow, the Celts were a great people, whether the Scotch came from Ireland or *vice versa*. They dominated Europe in their time, as Mr. Nowlan says, and a wonderful chapter of history it would be if only we had its full text.

And there was a later period—along about Charlemagne's time—when the Irish dominated it a second time, not by force of arms but by force of knowledge and culture. Maybe Mr. Nowlan will tell us about that some time.

Having now satisfied my Irish by getting myself into trouble, I give Mr. Nowlan the floor:

Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.

Dear Mr. Hoffman: Quite in accordance with your forecast, and with your permission and his, I rise to quarrel a bit with Mr. Charles Grant MacNeill's version of the origin of the "Mac" Neills of Ireland, as he insists on calling them—though not with Mr. MacNeill himself, to whom is due a vote of thanks from all tradition-loving Gaels for his hardihood in risking life and limb in bringing up the subject and thus generously offering his own head for the first crack.

At the same time I find I must venture certain of my counter-statements with some degree of reservation, since I write largely from memory, with some of my most precious authorities locked in the cellar, safe from the ravages of certain very young and very Irish members of the clan O'Nuaulain (which is just another and more historic way of spelling Nolan or Nowlan). No doubt I shall be corrected myself on certain points—and more power to the correctors.

IN THE first place I believe Mr. MacNeill rather underestimates the Irish antiquity of the O'Neills, and credits the Scottish clans with a bit too much. I think the seven hundred years of their Scottish history to which he refers will dwindle to something like four hundred odd years on reference to Scottish clan histories.

The origin of the two MacNeill clans of Scotland is a bit obscure. Their identity as clans is clear only from about the last days of the power of the Lords of the Isles, in the fifteenth century. It is quite probable that the clans were offshoots of the O'Neills of Ireland. All of the Gaelic (in contradistinction to the Pictish) clans of the Highlands had their origin in immigrations and settlements, peaceful and otherwise, from the shores of Ireland—chiefly from the northern shores and most largely in the second and third centuries A. D., though by no means exclusively from this district or within the period mentioned. The Lords of the Isles were MacDonalds. The O'Donnells of Ireland were what might be called a twin clan with the O'Neills, and in a sense regarded themselves as O'Neills, as also did a very heavy proportion of the Northern Irish clans which acknowledged the leadership of the O'Neills or traced their own origins directly to the O'Neills, as did the O'Raffertys and many others. It is quite likely that there is a real significance between the connection of the O'Donnells and the O'Neills on the one hand and the MacDonalds and the MacNeills on the other. But all this is not by any means the same thing as saying that the names of the two Scottish clans MacNeill are derived from O'Neill of Ireland (or if Mr. MacNeill *must* have his way, the "Mac" Neills of Ireland).

STILL less is it the same as saying that they were founded by that famous Niul of Scythia, one of whose sons is reputed to have sliced off his fin and tossed it ashore, and who is, I am afraid, misplaced by a good many centuries in Mr. MacNeill's historic recollections. Not even the O'Neills of Ireland claim that they take their name from him. Then too, since the entire incident of the Red Hand of Ulster is so largely legendary, there is quite a little ground for doubt that it was a son of this particular Niul who pulled the publicity stunt in question. The name of Niul or Nial was just about as uncommon in Ireland from 1000 B. C. to about 1600 A. D. as John is in the United States today. Clan names were rather loose and unstabilized in Ireland until the reign of Brian Boru at the close of the tenth century A. D. Brian instructed the clans to take their choice of clan names from one or another of

their famous ancestors' given names and to stick to them. The O'Neills picked Nial of the Nine Hostages as their actual and selected founder, not Niul of Scythia.

AND to digress a moment to the Bloody Hand again. The legend, as it sticks in my mind was simply that three O'Neills, brothers and suitors for the hand of the same princess, arranged for themselves a public boat race with the understanding that he whose hand first touched the shore should get the girl. The youngest chieftain, most favored by the young lady, evidently had the poorest crew in his war galley, and was running third when they approached the shore. So with true Irish wit he put one over on his brothers and technically fulfilled the contract, great store being set by technicalities and legal points in those days.

But the chances are that the MacNeills of Scotland were founded by some chieftain named Nial, very probably of O'Neill stock, but the clan name being founded on his given name rather than on the clan name of the O'Neills.

Now for the Niul of Scythia who was, according to Mr. MacNeill, teaching school in Spain and had three sons who heard of Ireland and its petty kingdoms, etc. This is a picture which is, to say the least, "sketchy."

IRELAND, it has now been pretty well established, derives its blood chiefly from three different Celtic peoples, the Firbolgs, the Tuatha De Danann and the Milesians. It has been the blending of the blood of these three specific Celtic peoples, all emanating originally from the same section of the world, that vague district in Southeastern Europe anciently known as Scythia, migrating through and around Europe, and reaching Ireland at different periods, that has produced that particular branch of the Celtic race which has become known as the Gaelic. There was another race, the Formorians, who entered into the combination in lesser degree, a seafaring race of rovers from the northern shores of Africa, who may or may not have been Celtic.

From the times of Solomon the Scythians, or Celts, were a far more powerful influence in Europe than our school histories, devoted chiefly to Jewish, Babylonian, Assyrian, Egyptian, Greek and Roman chronology, reveal. It was until a fairly recent date assumed that the Celtic migrations into Western Europe were the result of the "push" of the Teutonic peoples behind them, an assumption based upon the Teutonic migrations into Western Europe in more historic times. More modern authorities, however, as the result of correlation of later discoveries in ethnological, philological and to some extent archeological reasearch, incline to the belief (and please do not accuse "prejudiced" Irishmen of this, for the idea comes chiefly from the Germans themselves) that the Teutonic races were the prior inhabitants of Central Europe, in a quiescent and barbaric state, and that through this prehistoric period the various branches of the Celtic race, a rather highly civilized (note the description) and eminently warlike people, spread out among the Teutonic (and in some sections Slavic) races, dominating them, in some cases by conquest and in some cases without it, but seldom subjecting them to any vigorous oppression.

Many of the Celtic tribes, or clans, passed through the Teutonic belt, across the Rhine, reaching France, Spain, Northern Italy, England, Ireland and Scotland. Others spread southward, entire clans enlisting in the service of Alexander the Great and his father Philip, by whom they were ranked among their best, and be it noted, most independent soldiers. They irritated Alexander, whose conquests in the East accustomed him to servile homage, by fearlessly giving him whatever was their ancient equivalent of the modern razz over his high hat. At another period they enlisted by clans in the service of the Pharaohs.

It is further to be noted that prior to this Egyptian chapter of Celtic history, the Berbers, whose racial and historic entity has been preserved more accurately through a longer period of time, probably, than any race on earth, were described by the Egyptians as a dark-haired, dark-eyed and dark-skinned people, while Egyptian hieroglyphics of a somewhat later period mention the prevalence among them of blue eyes and lighter skins. It is by no means an established fact, but certainly a pertinent question, whether certain of the Celtic tribes did not settle and blend with the Berbers at this early period. Otherwise, whence the light complexions? There is no indication of Teutonic appearance in the South at this period.

A Celtic cemetery, unearthed somewhere in northern Austria, proves the Celts of this period to have been comparatively a highly cultured race, skilled in both arts and industry, with heavy emphasis on mining and agriculture; about as highly civilized as any race of the period (which was about 1000 B. C. if my memory is not at fault). But they built chiefly in wood, not stone, and the visible evidences of their civilization have not been so enduring.

IN EUROPE the Celtic peoples lived in comparative amity with one another. There was a consciousness among them of their common blood and brotherhood, in which they differed from the Roman to whom they later fell victims and to whom men of other races than his own were merely living beings in the form of men, but aside from this as much differentiated from him as cattle, dogs and tigers, and treated variously as such, according to the exigencies of the occasion. They were more literate than the Romans wherever the latter formed their first contacts with them (using chiefly the Greek alphabet), but this was the same as illiteracy and ignorance in the conception of the Romans, since their language and their moral and political philosophy was un-Roman.

They existed throughout Europe as a sort of federation of patrician republics with something here

and there like a kingdom among them. Their federation was, it is true, a rather loose one, since the interests of each clan of political entity were localized. They traded freely, apparently subscribed to a common law in matters of equity, and frequently combined against a common enemy of alien race. This last trait, it would seem, was largely responsible for their domination of Europe and the Teutonic and Slavic races with which they came in contact. They warred frequently among themselves, but generally in a spirit of chivalry, and never, it would seem from all available indications, in a spirit of exterminative conquest for economic motives, since the free life they lived was not particularly calculated to stimulate economic greed.

THE Firbolgs were the first element of the future Gaelic race to reach Ireland, presumably having migrated overland through Europe from Scythia. They are the first race in Ireland of which any trace is left. They were bothered, but apparently not seriously so, by incursions at a later date from the Formorian sea rovers of Africa. In the end, both races settled down together and somewhat intermingled, the Formorians being distinctly in the minority. At precisely what time this occurred only God knows so far. The Firbolgs, according to all indications, were among the least cultured of the Celtic races and seem really to have deserved the name of barbarians. They were a dark-haired, brown-eyed type of Celt. A heavy, thickset race that possibly was not pure Celtic.

At a later period, probably that of the greatest European culture of the Celts, appeared the Tuatha De Danann ("people of the Goddess Dana"), who also reached the Bristish Isles overland through Europe. A highly cultured, golden or reddish haired, blue-eyed, fair-skinned race of large stature. Apparently they wished to settle down amicably with the Firbolgs as the Celts of Central Europe had done among the Germans, but the suspicion of the Firbolgs, who regarded their superior skill, knowledge and culture in the light of sorcery, prevented until conquest settled the issue. It is most likely that the De Danann were a pure Celtic race, certainly of high civilization. They subdued the Firbolgs with ease and dispatch. There is evidence that their culture was more perfected than that of the Milesians at the time the latter arrived to form the final and dominating element of the combination since known as the Gaelic race.

THE Milesians arrived by sea, via Egypt and Spain. They were, according to correlation of Irish legend and Egyptian record, one of those Celtic clans which sought service with the Pharaohs. One of their chiefs, Gaodhal Glas, is supposed to be responsible for the term Gael. It is supposed that it was his grandson, one Niul, who obtained from a Pharaoh the hand of his daughter in marriage. This Niul had been sought by Pharaoh as an instructor, most probably as a military instructor for other troops in his armies (here we have the genesis of Mr. MacNeill's "school-teacher" idea). During his leadership of his own people they became rich and powerful in Egyptian affairs, but later, under a succeeding Pharaoh, they apparently asserted their "Irish" independence over some injustice, real or fancied, and rebelled, fighting their way out in some direction or other beyond the limits of Egyptian power. Niul died. He never lived to "teach a school" in Spain, which indeed would have been some come-down for a warrior chieftain, military instructor and honored son-in-law of a Pharaoh.

But a relative of his, possibly a son, or maybe a nephew, who also had married a daughter, Scota, of another Pharaoh (from whom Ireland was first called Scotia by the Milesians, and themselves Scoti or Scots—a name not applied to Scotland and the residents thereof for many centuries thereafter, at the time of the Irish colonizations there) became the leader of the clan, which took to the sea, journeying first to Crete, and thence to the shores of Spain where they received temporary shelter from another Celtic tribe, from whom they learned of Ireland, and after an expedition of investigation, determined to "adopt" the island, peaceably if they could or by recourse to arms.

The speculation injects itself here as to whether it may not have been a branch of this clan, expelled from Egypt, which found its way among the Berbers, or whether it was another Celtic tribe.

BUT at any rate, Scota's husband, Miled or Milesius, died in Spain. And it was Scota, the daughter of a Pharaoh, who led her eight "Irish" sons and their families and Celtic followers to Ireland. The lady apparently had imbibed a great deal of "Irish" enterprise, and it was not so strange after all that her followers came to call themselves Scots as frequently as Milesians. Nor is the legendary picture of a family party of this sort conquering an entire island out of line. In the first place it must be remembered that they raised *some* families in those days, and that those casually dismissed as "followers" probably totaled several thousand for the eight sons and their family connections, and that Ireland had been selected as their objective probably because it was thinly populated, since they were already in Spain, safe from the pursuit of Pharaoh and among a Celtic people that was extending hospitality to them. Finally, it is evident that their purpose was not conquest, but room for settlement. Nor did William the Conqueror have many millions with him when he landed in England.

All this happened, according to the most recent analyses of the historical and legendary evidence, probably 1000 B. C. or possibly only 500 B. C.

The Milesians were unquestionably a brown-haired race of medium complexion, probably the result of an admixture of Egyptian blood, and in this respect a contrast both to the golden or red-haired De Danann and the black-haired Firbolgs. They established their domination gradually by force of arms, and ultimately mixed in with the other two races to form the Gaelic.

HARKING back to the Celtic domination of northern Europe generally, Roman historians mention an "uprising" or "revolt" of the Germanic tribes against the Celts about 300 B. C. This was the beginning of the end for them, the breaking down of that system of federated patrician republics, and the beginning of the Teutonic "squeeze play," which many historians, particularly the Teutomaniacs (though not so much the Germans themselves), until recently assumed was something like a perpetual prehistoric phenomenon. The Galatians, among whom St. Paul worked, were still speaking a tongue in the days of St. Jerome, five centuries later, which since has been identified as Celtic, or Gallic. They were a fragment apparently driven southward by the Germanic roughneck explosion. And by the time Mr. Caesar arrived to stage his famous feat of "halving all Gaul into three quarters," as the Irish version has it, the Celts of the Continent, who three hundred years before used to storm the gates of Rome every time they felt like a little excitement, were pretty well on the run.

MR. MACNEILL informs us that in the ninth century "Ireland was united into one kingdom and thus took its place among the nations of the world" under a king named "Neill the Great." This is about as close to it as the "Scythian schoolteacher in Spain. Apparently nine hostages and nine centuries have gotten confused in this account. Nial of the Nine Hostages is evidently the monarch to whom he refers. He reigned in the fourth century, and was very dead by the ninth. He was, it is true, one of the most powerful and fightingest of a line of High-Kings who kept Ireland (more or less) united into one kingdom and taking its place among the nations of the world through a period of some 2,000 years or more ending somewhere around 1200 A. D., in the collapse of Roderick O'Connor, the last of the High-Kings. It is also true that the O'Neills trace their clan to him. It is true that the O'Neills founded the strongest dynasty, but by no means the only one.

In addition, Mr. MacNeill puts it in a rather misleading way. It would be better to say that the O'Neills furnished more of Ireland's High-Kings than any other clan. But there was not, strictly speaking, anything "dynastic" about the job of High-King. It was an elective post, eligibility to which was at certain periods, by common consent among the clans, permitted to alternate between the southern and northern O'Neill clans. But there were plenty of the several hundred in the line of High-Kings who were not O'Neills at all. Brian Boru, who united all northern Christian Europe against the pagan Vikings, breaking their power for all time at the battle of Clontarf, 1014 A. D., was no O'Neill, but a member of the Clann Dal Cais from whom the clan adopted the more modern name of O'Brien. Incidentally, Brian's Dalcassian brigade is reputed to have been the finest and best-trained body of plain and fancy ax-fighters the world has ever known, 3,000 strong.

MR. MACNEILL is also astray in his reference to the custom of "designating some one as 'The MacNeill' meaning that he was accepted as the heir to the throne." In the first place nobody in Ireland was ever referred to as "The MacNeill" (unless perhaps the head of the Scottish clan of that name in Ireland on a visit, which I don't know if he ever was or not). But the heads of the O'Neill and O'Donnell clans, frequently the same, were designated as "The O'Neill," just as the head of any other clan was known by the clan name simply with "The" prefixed. It meant that he was the head of the clan. Just that and nothing more; not that he was the claimant of the High-King's throne. Moreover the custom is a very ancient one, and did not originate in the rebellions following the Norman conquest of Ireland.

HOWEVER all this may be, the Red Hand is both the symbol and the battle-cry of the O'Neills of Ulster, and there must be something to the legend concerning it. Lots of people make the mistake of taking it for granted that characters around whom legends have grown up are "mythical." The fact is, and a little reflection obviates necessity for argument on the point, that legends grow up around characters who are the very opposite of mythical. Lacking any other historical evidence than the cherry-tree story we would be more logical in assuming the existence of a George Washington than his non-existence. Ditto as regards Abraham Lincoln and the million or two funny stories ascribed to him, most of which he probably never heard. But the mere fact that they are ascribed to him is evidence of his reality and the fact that he appreciated and told jokes.

It is so with these old Irish legends which are so often regarded as purely mythical. The shanachies or story-tellers might go to any lengths to outdo one another in their embellishments of detail on the old stories, but it is logical to assume that in their essentials they are true and that the characters in them were real. These stories were classics, and the bard took his life or reputation in his hands if he monkeyed with their essentials, though the sky was the limit so far as the frilly trimmings were concerned.
—PHILIP FRANCIS NOWLAN.

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'ARRIVE (by rail) Adis Abeba March 17." This is the last line of the itinerary which Gordon MacCreagh wrote out for us on the boat deck of the *American Merchant* just before *Adventure's* Abyssinian Expedition left on the first lap of its long journey. As these pages go into print the expedition, with luck, is on the train that crawls up the African mountains to the capital of Abyssinia from Djibuti on the Red Sea. It will have been weeks in the wilderness at the time

you read this, and we here in the office shall still be awaiting the first report written by Mr. MacCreagh before his party left the comparative civilization of the Abyssinian city to set off into the wild.

You knew of course that *Adventure's* Abyssinian Expedition with Gordon MacCreagh at its head set sail on February 10th to look into the native legend that the Ark of the Covenant is hidden in the mountains of Abyssinia, to find what fact may lie behind other folk tales of the country and to capture for the Zoological Department of the United States National Museum certain species of rare wild ape. Mr. MacCreagh will write on the spot his own accounts of the experiences of the expedition. We will publish the accounts as they come to us from the other side of the world. The issue of June fifteenth will likely be the earliest in which the first one can appear. Look for it then.

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THE house has deemed it best to discontinue the Travel and Straight Goods Departments and to devote the space used by them to more fiction. After all, this leaves us with all the original Departments and with one more added since the change of ownership a year ago.

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A FEW words from Georges Surdez about his story in this issue, "The Well of Bitter Waters."

Governor Dufaure is not altogether of my creation. A gentleman with the same ideas of peace and good-will as applied to the Timbuktu region existed in fact. I would not go so far as to say that Monsieur the Governor had any motive in his heart other than the purest altruism. But he did remove Major Ebener, who had succeeded Lieutenant-Colonel Joffre (the Joffre of the World War), and replaced him with an officer of his choice, a man who did not protest too loudly against the obvious stupidity of peaceful conquest.

It was quite possible for a subaltern officer to forget orders and get away with it. Lieutenant Wirth, of the Colonial Infantry, did so. He took forty-five riflemen and mopped up the Bassikunu Raiders west of the Faguibine Marsh. He received an official blame, but his prestige as a soldier did not suffer much.

Since finishing the story, I received information that Tissek would not have used *amanchaye* (God), but would have put down the word *mokker*, which can be freely translated as "the infinite," or "the whole works." From another source, I heard that he would have used *Yallah* rather than any other expression for "God." I allowed the original word to stand, at the risk of displeasing the Targui public of *Adventure!*—G. S.

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FOR over fourteen years I've been sergeant-at-arms or toastmaster or conductor, or whatever it is, of our gatherings here. Camp-Fire was my idea in the beginning and naturally I've been happy in seeing it grow year by year until it numbers its hundreds of thousands and spreads all around the globe. It is a unique fellowship—unique in its democracy among all classes, creeds and nationalities, unique in the feeling of real fellowship and actual personal, human touch that has grown up among us. I should feel rather lost if I could no longer come to its meetings.

There is no prospect of my not coming to them, but as to my continuing as its conductor, well, isn't fourteen years long enough for one fellow to be in the chair? It's time for some one else to take his turn and let me sit down among the rest of you and listen to some one else do the talking. It hasn't been easy work, easy as it probably looks to most of you, and there are really quite a number of jobs in connection with running a magazine—despite a somewhat prevalent idea that all an editor has to do is to read stories, use a blue pencil and fill a waste-basket.

The house wants me to give all my time to fiction, turning over all the departments to the staff and freeing myself from all other duties not pertaining to the selection of stories and their proper assemblage in our magazine. That, in truth, is alone enough to fill my office hours and, though of course there is a very real pang of regret over resigning from my accustomed Camp-Fire duties, you will agree it is only natural I should look forward with a measure of relief toward a lessening of my work. Since *Adventure* and I started together in 1910 night work and Sunday work have been

the normal routine. I think I've served my full share of that and am entitled to a little more chance to live as I go along.

I'm a bit behind on vacations, too, and tired after an unusually hard year or so. The house is letting me slip away for a month or so down around the Caribbean and before I go away I'm turning "Camp-Fire" over to Mr. Cox, along with all the other departments. There is no one to whom I'd rather turn them over. He has for years been in direct charge of "Ask Adventure" proper, the question and answer part that is its backbone, has been in direct charge of "Books" since it began, is personally known to many of you and, except myself, has been on the staff far longer than any one else. He continues as managing editor, of course, merely adding to his duties those of general department editor and transferring other parts of his present work to other members of the staff.

I'll still be in charge through our next Camp-Fire and for a meeting or two there'll be stray bits left over from the old régime, but with our meeting after the next Mr. Cox takes the chair and any time I feel moved to talk I'll just take my chances, along with all the rest of Camp-Fire's comrades, at getting a bit of our space instead of having my remarks repose in the Camp-Fire cache until the god of luck draws them out.

You won't even have to listen to me in "Looking About." We're going to drop that department entirely—that is, merge it into "Camp-Fire" as it used to be. The house is good enough to leave me free to talk elsewhere in print and I know myself too well not to admit that sooner or later I'll be trying to say something somewhere in type along the lines of good citizenship and democracy. I've been at that some eighteen years and can't quit. But as readers of *Adventure* listening to me on these subjects will henceforth be entirely optional. And I give you my word that until I've had that vacation I'll not even want to talk about them.

In this matter of talking, however, I still have an advantage over the rest of you and I'm low enough to use it here and now—I want to be the first member of our Camp-Fire to congratulate Mr. Cox by climbing on the wood-pile and leading three rousing Camp-Fire cheers for him as our new master of ceremonies or whatever it is that I've been and he becomes. If he gets out of it half the lasting pleasure and half the friendships I have got he will be amply rewarded, and after nine years of working with him on our magazine I know he will deserve all we can give him.—A. S. H.

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SO THAT our readers may know him more fully than he is revealed in his story, we give here a short sketch of Meade Minnegerode.

Although his parents are American he was born in London, and his education was begun in England. Afterward he came to the United States, and was graduated from Yale in 1910. For three years thereafter he was attached to a publishing house in New York; then he went to the Munson Steamship Line. In 1917 he was appointed representative in France of the United States Shipping Board. During the war he served as First Lieutenant in the American Red Cross with the A.E.F.—incidentally winning a medal for service with French troops.

Ever since his college days Mr. Minnegerode's stories had been appearing in various periodicals, and on his return to America he devoted his attention entirely to writing. Since 1920 he has published nine books—novels, historical sketches, and critical appreciations. His "Some Personal Letters of Herman Melville," published in 1922, was an important factor in the wave of interest in the creator of "Moby Dick" which has been sweeping the country recently. "The Fabulous Forties," a brisk study of the mid-nineteenth century. "Some American Ladies," historical sketches so revised that in Tennessee and New Orleans meetings were held to discuss Rachel Jackson as she was presented in it, and "Cordelia Chantrell," a novel, are his most recent books. He has contributed sketches and fiction to "The Saturday Evening Post," "Farm and Fireside," "The Outlook," "Collier's," "The Ladies' Home Journal," "The Red Book" and "The Woman's Home Companion."

In the winter Mr. Minnegerode buries himself in the New York Public Library where authentic records and old narratives give him the material for his recreation of old New York.

In the summer he betakes himself to Long Island Sound, where he lives on a boat, cruises up and down the coast and races in his star class boat the *Black Star*.—J. M. C.

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### Eskimos

THE letter below concerning the night life of the Innuit is an interesting addendum to information supplied by Mr. Shaw—among other A. A. experts—to the Mellon Institute of Industrial Research, which is making extensive investigations into the sleeping habits of the peoples of all parts of the world.

*Request:*—"Your account of the sleeping equipment and habits of the Innuit is quite illuminating and is of particular use in our work since it illustrates one point rather well: namely, the disposition of man to develop as comfortable a type of bed as his environment will permit him to do.

There is one point about which I would appreciate obtaining additional information if you would be so kind as to furnish it. This information desired is about the distribution of their sleeping time. Does each individual sleep just whenever he feels 'the urge' to do so? Or are there more or less regular hours for sleeping which are generally observed?

Allow me to assure you that both your expression of good wishes and cooperation are very much appreciated."—THOMAS H. SWAN, Mellon Institute of Industrial Research, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pa.

*Reply,* by Mr. Victor Shaw:—The full-blooded Innuit (Eskimo) of northern Greenland is essentially a creature of impulse and of emotion, so far as my observation has extended. This, however, doesn't affect his sleeping arrangements, to any great extent.

His habits, if he may be said to have such, are governed chiefly by the need of the moment. I've seen them hunt like a pack of wolves for seal, caribou, gulls, ducks, anything to cram into their yearning bellies, hide, fur and feathers—raw. Then, when we had killed a polar bear, men, women and kids sat all day and all night, too, stuffing themselves until I had to crawl from my sleeping bag and administer emetic and purgative to a woman whose extremities were chilling already—she'd eaten so much that the distended stomach pressed too heavily upon the heart.

So it is with sleeping. If on the march, or a protracted hunt for bear, walrus, or caribou, he might travel long without sleep due to the excitement of the chase. But, when exhausted, he'd curl up anywhere in a sheltered spot, on the arctic moss, and tear off enough to carry him through.

In general, the Innuit sleeps when he is tired. There being no trains to catch, no job at which to be early, or late, the only matters which keep him on the move at all, are the continual needs of food and clothing. To obtain these, he spends all his time. When he has food, and furs on his back, time is no object; or, as that Georgia cracker said: "What's time to a hawg?" So he sleeps.

As a rule, however, the Innuit gets all the sleep he needs. I mean to say that he takes all he needs—if he runs short he'll very soon make it up, and perhaps more. He is prone to slump down in the sun on the moss, in summer, and doze. At their tiny villages (not very permanent these, for he is a nomad), you'll see him dozing on a heap of caribou skins in his sealskin tent; and he spends much time in winter sleeping on the snow bed-shelf when the weather doesn't permit watching for seal at their breathing holes in the ice. Sleeps off the ground—made comfortable with many soft furs.

And the Innuit is healthy. He is also happy. I've rarely seen a more smiling, good-natured, even-tempered individual, either barbarous or civilized. Innuits scarcely ever quarrel. They are not, despite their diet, consisting entirely of raw meat, in any sense fighters. Easy-going, light-hearted, without a care in the world, except the ever-present stalking wolf of hunger and cold, or that of death through accident, he doesn't know what worry may be.

## Cross-Country

THINK of what ground—literally and figuratively—is covered by the first short question below. And, remarkably enough, the answer is not much longer.

*Request:*—"I would like to find out:

1. The best walking route between New York and Seattle.

2. Can it be walked in winter?"—A. C. KIRKMAN, Boston, Mass.

*Reply,* by Dr. Fordyce:—I advise you to route via the Yellowstone Trail, hitting it at Ft. Wayne, Indiana after following the Pike's Peak Ocean to Ocean Highway from New York City. When you get to Spokane, Washington, instead of going on south to Walla Walla, go west on the National Parks Highway to Seattle.

I do not advise that it be walked in winter, but it makes a fine summer trip or, best, starting in the spring and continuing on during the summer.

I am sending you Some Hints on Walking Trips.

## Liberia

IT IS important to consider the social amenities as well as medicine for malaria if you plan to go to this East African country. Shirts with spine pads also are important.

*Request:*—"It is possible that I shall go to Liberia and there make my residence for an extended period of time, and information on the subjects listed below would be exceedingly helpful.

1. What S. S. lines from an Atlantic port connect with the Guinea Coast? How frequently can one sail directly to Liberia, or if a change of steamers is necessary, where? Is there a coastwise service that touches at Freetown, Sierra Leon? What is the fare first-class?

2. Clothing. White drill suits, shorts and solar topee are probably the everyday dress. As in British India, do the social amenities require that I include a tuxedo in my outfit?

3. Firearms. Would it be worthwhile for me to take a .22 caliber Remington Special for small game, also a .16 ga. shotgun? I have a .38 caliber Colt Police Positive and a 7.65 Luger. Which of these two sidearms would you advise for emergencies in the jungle from wild life? Is there any law covering the importation of firearms such as I have just mentioned?

4. Rainfall and temperature. The Guinea coast is said to have 150 inches annual rainfall. How is this distributed and is the climate uncomfortably moist? What is the temperature range.

5. Health. Is the climate unhealthy? Would the same precautions observed in southern India hold for Liberia?

6. Supplies. What native and foreign stores, trading posts, banks, etc., are located in Monrovia? What in the way of necessities must one bring with him?

7. Money. What is the U. S. value of the Liberian dollar.

8. Bathing. Can one enjoy swimming in that part of Africa or is it unsafe on account of sharks and crocodiles?

9. Is the higher hinterland of the country accessible from the coast and how high does it rise?—D. W. POWERS, Syracuse, N. Y.

*Reply,* by Mr. Collins:—1. Transportation. The Bull Line has monthly sailings from New York direct. Also the West Africa S.S. Co. (Elder Dempster), but the more convenient way is to proceed via Liverpool where you can get first-class passage (or good second class), by Elder Dempster. Write Daniel Bacon, 26 Beaver St., New York City, the U. S. agent for Elder Dempster Line. These lines all touch Liberia and Freetown. Trip is seventeen days from Liverpool. Fare app. $250 from Liverpool, first class.

2. Clothing. A tuxedo is most necessary in West Africa. Everyday dress in Coast towns and settled

communities consists of: washable suits of drill, crash, palm beach or solaro cloth. White drill is least preferred. For bush station: shorts, khaki shirts with spine pad, puttees, Woolsey helmet.

3. Firearms. Yes, take your .22 caliber Remington and .16 ga. shotgun. Also your .38 Colt if desired. Not necessary. Inquire Liberian Consul, New York, for firearm regulations.

4. Rainfall and temperature. Heavier rainfall in West. Inland it is drier and healthier but is always uncomfortably moist. The rains come heaviest in season from June to September. Temperature ranges from 80 to 110 but is disagreeable on account of moisture.

5. Health. Yes, climate is unhealthy unless proper precautions are taken regarding malaria, drinking water, etc. Conditions practically the same as in South India.

6. Supplies. This will depend on what capacity and where you are going. If to bush station will gladly furnish list. In Coast towns supplies are available. Bank of British West Africa, 17, Leadenhall St., London. Trading Companies: Compagnie Francaise de l'Afrique Occidental Paterson, Zochonis & Co. Monrovia.

7. Money. British money is used, rates varying according to exchange.

8. Plenty of sea bathing, but inland river bathing dangerous.

9. Liberia is all hilly, highest point 5,000 feet. No railways, transportation poor.

## R. C. M. P.

MORE about the "Mounties." It is strange to think that while so much fiction has been written about these romantic constables the books of fact that deal with them are few.

*Request:*—"I would like to secure the titles of any books dealing with the early days of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, especially around the period of the last Riel rebellion. I desire something that is authentic though not necessarily a history. More of anecdotes, personal experiences, etc."—GEO. C. REID, Downers Grove, Ill.

*Reply,* by Mr. Lee*:—I think the best book you can get dealing with the early days of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police would be "Policing the Plains," by, I think, John McBeth. Any good bookstore in Toronto, Ottawa, or any other large Canadian City would be able to furnish you with a copy. While not exactly a history of the force, "Policing the Plains" covers the whole period 1873-1918 and is full of anecdotes and interesting personal accounts of men who served through and prior to the Riel Rebellion.

There is another very good book written by Captain Deane, for forty years a member of the force. I cannot recall the exact title but if you drop a line to the Officer in Charge of Records, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Canada, he will be able to furnish you with the correct title of Deane's book and tell you where it can be obtained. Incidentally there is much interesting stuff about both the Red River Rising and Riel's attempt to make a half-breed republic in the West.

"Scarlet and Gold," published in Vancouver, B. C., is a magazine devoted to "old-timers" of the force and might give you something of what you require.

* See next page.

## Forestry

HOW to plant coniferous trees from seeds, and how to get the seeds. The simpler way of doing the latter is rather hard on squirrels.

*Request:*—"Kindly answer these questions on forestry.

1. Give the laws for transplanting, grafting, spraying and protecting trees, or better, tell me where I may obtain them as printed matter.

2. How and when should tree seeds be collected?

3. How are seeds cleaned and stored?

4. How and when should seeds be planted?

5. How should seedlings and transplants be cared for?

6. How should they be set out?

7. Should a black walnut 'nut' be planted as it is picked from the ground or the outer husk broken off, or both outer husk, and inner husk broken off, exposing the kernel? How and when should it be planted?"—W. A. CRAIG, Rockaway Beach, N. Y.

*Reply,* by Mr. Ernest Shaw:—You have suggested so many questions under number one, that it hardly seems advisable to attempt to reply to them in a letter of this kind. The subject is too big. Under that question I assume you are speaking entirely of fruit or orchard trees. In any event I suggest that you write "The Bureau of Publications, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.," asking for a list of the bulletins published by the Department. Under the "Farm Bulletins" and the "Forestry Bulletins" you will find all of those covering the information you desire. The titles are usually self-explanatory so that the subject matter is indicated.

No. 2. Coniferous species only. Seeds are collected in late fall by climbing the trees and picking the cones, either by shaking the limbs or using a cone-picker made of wire attached to a long light handle; or, by hunting squirrel hordes and digging out the cones. These hordes are usually found in galleries hollowed out under the roots of trees in the forest, where the squirrels have stored up the cones for their winter use.

No. 3. Cones are spread on frames on drying racks in the heating room and the temperature is raised to the proper heat required for a given species. When cones are opened, they are threshed and cleaned by running them through a grain fan.

Where only a small quantity of seed is required, this operation can be done on a small scale near the kitchen stove, or the cones can be opened by spreading on canvas sheets in the sun, taking in at night and during stormy weather.

No. 4. If in seed beds in nursery, in early spring as soon as earth is warm enough to work well. Seeds can be broadcasted over entire area of each seed bed or in matted rows through the bed. One-half-inch deep soil firmly pressed over.

No. 5. Seedlings should be kept free from weeds and in spring of second year should be transplanted to the transplant beds, using a transplant board if there are any quantity to move. Set out in rows about one foot apart and four inches apart in the row. Keep well cultivated and free from weeds and after one or two years as you desire remove to permanent site, or at end of first year again transplant and the following year set out in permanent site.

No. 6. Set out in early spring. Use spade, thrust into ground as deeply as required by the root system developed on your transplants. Move spade back and forth until opening is sufficient to permit inserting the roots of the young plant. Be sure it is set a little lower than it last grew. If soil is well packed by motion of the spade, then you may find it necessary to close the walls of the opening by repeating the use of spade on each side of the young plant. If soil is fairly loose you can firm the earth sufficiently by stamping with the heel around plant. The smaller the operation the more care can be taken in setting out. Set in rows four by four or six by six as required by species.

No. 7. I have had no experience with the various nuts. Instinct seems to tell me that if the whole nut of the walnut is planted that nature will, if given time, split the nut and allow the kernel to sprout. On the other hand one might aid nature by cracking the shell, taking care not to injure the kernel and hasten matters considerably. If the whole nut is planted it would doubtless help if the nut was soaked until well softened in luke-warm water. In either case planting could be done in the fall. A good general rule to follow in planting all seeds is to plant with a firm covering of earth the depth of the thickness of the seed being planted. This would mean about an inch in case of a walnut.

Suggest that you send for the list of publications as first mentioned. For some of the bulletins a small charge is made and others are sent free. The price of each is designated on the list.

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PATRICK LEE, whose answer to a query about the Royal Canadian Mounted Police appears in this issue, is a veteran of that service as well as of others. He had three years' war service with the London Scottish and Royal Flying Corps and was wounded in Battle of Arras. After the armistice he went out to Canada and joined the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, now the R. C. M. P., for whom he went north with party of nine men sent to establish police posts on the arctic islands. He helped to build and spent two years at Craig Harbor, Ellesmere Land, in latitude 76.10 N. Only inhabitants of 76,000 square miles of Ellesmere were three men of the Craig Harbor post and two families of Eskimos from Etah, N. Greenland. He left the service in 1925, is now married and on staff of a New York newspaper. There is room in the A. A. department for other experts whose knowledge of their subject, like Mr. Lee's, is based on first-hand experience. For particulars address JOSEPH COX, care *Adventure*.

**Our Experts**—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

The full list of experts will appear in the next issue. Besides geographical sections covering practically all of the world they handle the following topics: Salt and Fresh Water Fishing, Small Boating, Canoeing, Yachting, Motor Boating, Motor Camping, Motor Vehicles, All Shotguns, All Rifles, Edged Weapons, Firearms, Archery, First Aid on the Trail, Health Building Outdoors, Hiking, Camp Cooking, Mining and Prospecting, Forestry in the United States, Tropical Forestry, Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada, Aviation, Army Matters, Navy Matters, State Police, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Horses, Dogs, Photography, Linguistics and Ethnology, American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal, Herpetology, Entomology, Ornithology, Taxidermy, Stamps, Coins and Medals, Radio, Track, Tennis, Basketball, Bicycling, Swimming, Skating, Skiing and Snow-shoeing, Hockey, Boxing, Baseball, Football.

# *Old* SONGS *that Men have Sung*

*Conducted by* R. W. GORDON

*Devoted to outdoor songs, preferably hitherto unprinted—songs of the sea, the lumber-camps, Great Lakes, the old canal days, the negro, mountains, the pioneers, etc. Send in what you have or find, so that all may share in them. Although this department is conducted primarily for the collection and preservation of old songs, the editor will give information about modern ones when he can do so and if each request is accompanied with self-addressed envelope and sufficient reply postage* (not attached). Write to Mr. R. W. Gordon direct (*not* to the magazine), care of Adventure, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

IN THE old days of the sailing vessels, of ships as opposed to steamers, many a song was sung that is now forgotten. Some were true chanties and were used only when work was being done, but others were not so restricted. They were sung at any time, often for amusement, and were commonly called "fo'c'sle songs" or "forebitters."

A great cause of dispute and dissatisfaction in the old days was the amount and the quality of the food served the sailors. Finally an act of parliament defined with precision the exact amount of bread, meat and water, fresh vegetables, etc., that might be justly demanded by a British crew. If the owner did not furnish this minimum he was subject to heavy penalties. But there were many ways of evading. Often a crew would agree to certain cuts in return for luxuries not included in the act. Dissatisfaction still continued and many songs were popular ridiculing the act itself. Here is one of them.

### The Lime-Juice Ship

(*Text sent in by Captain C. W. Robertson, Australia.*)

Now if you want a lime-juice ship
  Well you must roam at large,
And as it is a British ship
  You must have a good discharge.
It must be signed by the Board o' Trade,
  And everything exact,
For there's nothing done in a lime-juice ship
  Contrary to the Act.

*Shout, boys, shout!*
  *For you know that it's a fact.*
*There's nothing done in a lime-juice ship*
  *Contrary to the Act!*

The first thing that they do for you
  The articles are read;
They tell you of your beef and pork,
  Your water and your bread,
Your flour and your peas,
  Precious little else for Jack!
But what's the use of growling
  When you know you get your whack.

Oh, slack away the weather main brace
  And haul away the lee!
Sheet home your jibs and tops'ls, boys,
  We'll soon be out to sea!
Haul away steady, my boys,
  Bouse down the stout main tack!
What the hell's the use of growling
  Now you know you get your whack?

Along the deck, my bully boys,
  With many a curse we go,
Waiting to hear eight bells struck
  That we may go below.
Eight bells are struck and muster called
  The log is hove exact.
"Relieve the wheel, and go below,
  Accordin' to the Act!"

That's not so humorous as most of the versions of the song. The most ridiculous I ever heard was sung to me by an Irishman, Jim Desmond, last of the old whitehall boatmen of San Francisco. I have the copy stored away somewhere in my manuscripts, and better yet I have the phonograph record of Jim's singing. Neither of these are now accessible, but I remember a few lines. They may bring a smile to the lips of any real "tall water man."

Bring along your handy billy,
  And set it on the main tack!
For we're goin' to lower our tops'ls
  Accordin' to the Act!

WITHOUT humor, but with all the tang of the sea in it, is the following account of the sailors' dangers. It was a prime favorite, and had many different versions. If any of you know some of them, please send them in to the department.

### The Banks of Newfoundland

(*Text from Mr. Charles E. Duffy, British Columbia.*)

Ye landsmen bold may bless your lot,
  All ye who remain on shore
Free from the stormy western waves
  Which round poor seamen roar.
It's little you know the hardships great
  That we were forced to stand,
Fourteen days and fourteen nights
  On the Banks of Newfoundland.

Our ship was clogged with ice and snow
  From the day that we left Quebec,
And only that we kept moving round
  We'd be frozen to the deck.

Our crew were almost all composed
  Of trueborn Irishmen,
And our Captain doubled each man's grog
  On the Banks of Newfoundland.

The wind blew from the Nor'Nor'East
  With a cold and chilly blast,
But the cruel waves came rolling in
  And broke our main topmast.
And our Captain said, "My gallant lads,
  We'll have to invent some plan
For to hoist a signal of distress
  On the Banks of Newfoundland."

Our gallant bark was never made to face
  The stormy western waves;
The raging sea came tumbling in
  And pounded us to staves.
Being built of green unseasoned oak,
  She wasn't formed to stand
The hurricane which met us there
  On the Banks of Newfoundland.

When we were out four long days
  Our provisions they ran out,
And early, early on the fifth
  We cast our lots about.
The lot fell on the Captain's son,
  Being no relief at hand,
But we let him go for another day
  On the Banks of Newfoundland.

And early, early on the sixth
  The crew they did prepare;
The boy was on his bended knees
  With one short hour for prayer.

But God being kind to all of us
  Kept blood from every hand
Till an English vessel hove in sight
  On the Banks of Newfoundland.

And out of all of our brave crew
  Nine were left to tell the tale
The other forty-eight poor souls
  They met a watery grave.
Their parents will nevermore see their face
  Or shake them by the hand
Where the mountainous waves roll o'er their graves
  On the Banks of Newfoundland.

THERE were once many of these songs. There still are many today hidden,away in the memories of the old-timers who once sang them. But memory is an uncertain thing at best. And there comes a time when memory ceases. Send in what you still remember before it is too late. You can not count on the other man's doing it. If *you* know them it is your duty to see that they are preserved, that is if you think as much of them and of the old days as I believe you do. Here is a chance not only to preserve them, but to pass them on that others who once knew them may enjoy again. If they are lost it will be *your* fault. Send them in, *every single one you know*, fragments as well as complete versions.

SEND all contributions of old songs, and all requests for copies of them, direct to R. W. GORDON, care of *Adventure*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

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# *The* Trail *Ahead*

*The next issue of* ADVENTURE, *out May 1st*

## *A Complete Novelette*

## Rusudan

By Harold Lamb

When *Sir Hugh* of Taranto fled the wrath of the treacherous emperor of the Greeks, he found sanctuary and service under the sign of the khan of the Great Horde. To the kingdom of the Georgians he went as envoy, and there instead of meek submission and a fawning ruler he met with a brave threat—and the Princess Rusudan.

## Beginning *a New Serial*

## A New Found World

By Roger Pocock

Dying, *Katla* the witch cast a curse on *Eric the Red*. Power the curse seemed to have none, till one day his young son *Lief* started a brawl that ended with serious consequences. As a result *Eric* lost his lands and faced banishment. So he turned the prow of his ship westward to seek a great unknown land.

## The Greatness of Little Mungye

By Lyman Bryson

He was an elephant called *Uncle*. His years were honorable and always had he been amiable and devoted to the little brown man, his master. It was a sad day, then, that he betrayed his master's faith in him, and he knew he must do some fine thing in expiation.

## Homeward Bound

By Captain Dingle

There was nobody at home to kill any fatted calves for "*Humpy*" *Rogers*. To greet him there would be only the scum of the docks, to give him a grin, a whack on the back and a swig from a black bottle. And he knew there were far fairer ports of call in the springtime. Yet he ached for home.

## And—*Other Good Stories*

*Part Two of* Wastrel, *Dan McGuire in the South Seas*, by Gordon Young; Kingbird, by Hugh Pendexter, *the little feller returns;* Jim Clancy Shoves Off, by Edward L. McKenna, *a prizefighter in a joss-house;* Sanctuary, by Stewart Robertson, *a judgment in the North Woods.*

Adventure is out on the 1st and 15th of the month

# A Dagger—then a Kiss

*The story of a gypsy loved by a soldier, a priest, and a hunchback.*

ALL AT ONCE, above her lover's head, she saw a livid, convulsed face; beside this face there was a hand which held a dagger. It was the face and hand of the priest who had crept into the room. The young girl, frozen mute by the frightful apparition, could not utter even a cry. She saw the poniard descend, and rise dripping.

"*Malédiction!*" cried the captain, and fell back on the bench.

She fainted. As her eyes closed, as all consciousness left her, she thought she felt a firey touch upon her lips, a kiss more burning than an executioner's branding-iron.

When she recovered she was surrounded by soldiers of the watch who were carrying off the captain; the priest had disappeared; the window at the back of the room, looking up the river, was wide open; they picked up the priest's cloak, which they supposed belonged to the officer, and she heard them saying:

"'Tis a sorceress who has stabbed a captain."

In Victor Hugo's famous novel, *Notre Dame of Paris*, the priest, Claude Frollo, archdeacon, alchemist, almost magician, had seen Esmeralda, a beautiful gypsy girl, dancing in the street and had fallen violently in love with her. Yielding to the sudden temptation he has her carried off that night, but the girl is rescued by the gay De Châteaupers, captain of the king's archers. With him she naturally falls in love; surprised in their nocturnal assignation by Frollo, the captain is poniarded by the priest and Esmeralda arrested and put to torture for his murder, although he survives the wound. She is rescued by her grateful slave Quasimodo, the hunchback bell-ringer of the cathedral, and hidden in one of the towers. Hugo's account of Quasimodo's vengeance against Frollo is one of the most thrilling in all literature. MOST TRANSLATIONS AND THE FILMS GIVE ONLY A GARBLED VERSION OF THE STORY.

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In *The Miserables* you find a great series of five novels in which Hugo sets forth his ideas of social democracy. The hero is Jean Valjean, an ex-convict become a philanthropist, who befriends Fantine, a *grisette*. He is pursued by Javert, a detective, who is the incarnation of social order. There are hundreds of other characters. This series is full of scenes of great power—the escape of Valjean, his flight through the sewers; and many others reveal Hugo's genius at its heights.

In *The Toilers of the Sea* Gilliat, loving Déruchette, undertakes a herculean task, and, in spite of a struggle with a devil-fish and other obstacles, succeeds. In *The Laughing Man* a disfigured youth, lost son of a peer who loves the beautiful but blind Dea, finds himself furiously loved by a duchess—one of Hugo's most remarkable creations "a virgin Messalina," who offers herself to him.

In *Ninety-three* you follow the strange career of a woman of Paris amid stirring scenes of the French Revolution. In *Han of Iceland* a young captain, in love with a chancellor's daughter, fights a great duel. In *Bug Jargal* a slave in love with his master's daughter leads a revolt in St. Domingo. In *Last Day of a Condemned* you find a startling analysis of the sensations of a man condemned to death.

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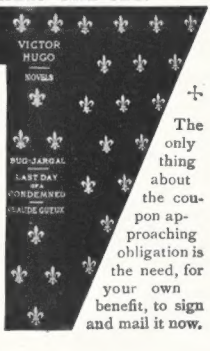


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